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EPILOGUE

PROLOGUE

"IS THERE TO BE NO END OF THIS SPOILING OF all the beauties of our lovely country?" wrote Brown of Clapham or Smith of Wimbledon — the name is of no consequence — to a London paper at the beginning of the summer of 1929. And having asked his rhetorical question, Smith or Brown proceeded to give his instance.

"For some years past," he wrote, "I have been accustomed to take my family for the annual holiday to the picturesque little watering-place of Porth, in the west of Wales. The place has always commended itself to me, not only for the beauty of the rocky coast, the excellent sands with their facilities for safe bathing, and the capital golf course, but also for the quiet, so valuable for those whose nerves have been set on edge by the inevitable racket and hurry of modern life. Within ten minutes' stroll of the centre of the town, it was always possible to secure perfect peace on the dunes, where I have been accustomed to spend many hours, greatly to the benefit of my health.

"Last week, I was unexpectedly called to Porth on a matter of business. Judge of my disgust when, on the first day of my visit, finding myself at leisure for a couple of hours, I took my usual stroll on the dunes, and found myself in the midst of a scene far noisier than Piccadilly Circus or Charing Cross. A hideous building, of staring red brick and grotesque design, has been erected in the midst of what was once a grassy amphitheatre, sweet with the growth of the wild thyme. On a balcony, a jazz band was emitting ear-splitting cacophonies, and dancing was in full swing. Coconut shies, swings, roundabouts, and shooting galleries were all in evidence and seemed fully patronised. The more popular entertainments were surrounded by a surging mass of people; the noise was deafening. The whole effect was that of a country fair on a Saturday night. I walked back to my hotel at once, horrified at the growth of a crude commercialism which has vulgarised and destroyed the peace and beauty of what was once one of the most charming spots in the island."

Thus Smith of Wimbledon — I think we will let him have the credit of the deed — and thus began the famous Beauty Spot correspondence and controversy.

For, of course, Smith was not allowed to have it all his own way. A good many people agreed with him and confirmed his complaint. One man wrote from "a typical old English town in the midlands The Town Hall, he said, a beautiful specimen of sixteenth-century half-timber architecture, had stood in the middle of the town, and gave character to the place. "With the

object, I suppose, of enabling motorists to dash through the town at an even greater speed than that to which they have been accustomed, this beautiful building has been destroyed. Moreover, the Watch House, a fine example of Queen Anne brickwork, has been pulled down, and its place taken by the new Town Hall, a square monstrosity in white concrete, adorned (?) with grotesque sculptures in the manner of Easter Island."

Then there was the sad story of Dix Regis, famous formerly for its thatched cottages and its brook running down the middle of the winding village way; now much more famous for its motor factory, and its blocks of workers' dwellings; "all of them strictly functional in design," as a lover of the new order of things protested. There was Morrow End, with its ancient avenue of walnut-trees; these had been cut down, every one of them, because the residents, as a whole, considered that they made the houses damp. An F.S.A. was in a very bad temper about the doings at Polters Ambo, on the Yorkshire coast. This was a little place that had been a maze of old red brick courts and alleys and backways with narrow, steep flights of steps leading from one winding street to another, and an interesting chapel of St. Michael, in very fair preservation, built in the thirteenth century on a jagged rock in the middle of the harbour. Ambo was strangely transmuted. Few of the old courts and alleys survived. Their place had been taken by rows of lodging houses in glazed brick and tasty tiles, by big hotels in concrete and lots of glass. There were lifts from the harbour to the High Town. It had been found necessary to destroy St. Michael's Chapel, and to blast away the upper part of the rock, the lower portion of which helped to support the pier and its cheerful pavilion. The F.S.A., as I have remarked, wrote very crossly about these Ambo doings; and the like complaints came from all over the country about other doings of the same kind: the making of deep, ferny, oak-shadowed lanes into ditches like railway cuttings, setting up aerodromes in ancient solitudes, and erecting "prehistoric beastliness" — as the enemy called it — as sculptured memorials on quiet village greens.

"I have to pass this horrible group," wrote a country parson, "every time I enter the church. I sometimes think I must be in Nbanga — Nbanga Land, not in Sussex."

And, of course, there was the other side — plenty of it. Mrs. Partington was quoted a great deal. The merits of modern architecture were explained, very patiently; with dissertations on the suitability of steel and glass for structural work. It was pointed out, again and again, that we were not living in the sixteenth century, but in the twentieth; and that the traffic of the present could not move on the bridle-paths and water-tracks of the past. The F.S.A., who had shown temper over the alterations at Ambo, was convicted of selfishness. "An insanitary and tortuous village," wrote the Mayor, "has been converted into a happy, cheerful resort, where thousands of poor workers wash away the smoke of the mills in the health-giving, ozone-laden breezes of

the north sea. The pier, of which 'F.S.A.' makes such bitter complaint, brings the weary toilers into close quarters with the sea; and the round of entertainments given in the Pavilion, most of them of very high quality, offer an alternative to the dubious pleasures of the public-house.

It was, no doubt, unfortunate that the old chapel had to be destroyed; but many feel that the Pier and Pavilion correspond more closely with the ideas and requirements of the present time." Another correspondent addressed himself briefly to the question at large. "We have become a poor nation," he said. "Poor people cannot afford luxuries. Crooked roads and ruined chapels are, no doubt, luxuries to some of us; but we must learn to do without them." An artist, with a curiously exotic name, declared that the brick-sculpture, "The Birth of the Calf", executed in yellow bricks, which adorned the village green at Little Pedlington, marked an epoch. Somebody wrote to say that he didn't like it at all; but the artist simply replied, "O God! O Montreal!" and was considered to have scored heavily.

It was a highly entertaining correspondence, and went on for weeks. So far as I remember, very little notice was taken of an indignant letter from the Town Clerk of Porth, the Welsh watering-place where all the row began. It was, I say, an indignant letter, with signs of suppressed spluttering about it, but, considering the provocation, laudably restrained.

"I am at a loss to understand the letter of your correspondent, Mr. Smith of Wimbledon.

"He informs your readers that an unsightly and blatant building has been erected on the dunes — I presume he refers to the Burrows — near Porth.

"He adds that a band played jazz music, that dancing was in progress, that coconut shies, roundabouts, swings and shooting galleries had attracted throngs of people, and that the noise was deafening. In short, he gives your readers to understand that the amenities of Porth have been completely ruined.

"My reply to this, is that there is not one word of truth in your correspondent's allegations. No such building as he describes has been erected on the Burrows. No band plays or has played there or anywhere in the neighbourhood. The ground is quite unsuited for dancing, and, in fact, no dancing has taken place in the position indicated. No booths, coconut shies, shooting galleries, swings, or roundabouts would be permitted on the Burrows; and there was nothing of the kind there on the date indicated. The majority of the visitors to Porth betake themselves to the sands, the finest in Europe, and avail themselves of the bathing facilities provided by the Municipality. The natural golf course (eighteen holes), second to none in the island, attracts many, while others are glad to visit the beautiful scenery, coastal and inland, and the ancient castles for which the county is famous. For these, an admirable service of luxurious motor coaches is provided.

"In no case, and under no circumstances, will surging masses of people be found on the Burrows, where those who desire quiet and solitude will always be able to gratify their wishes.

"It is true that the Annual Fair, held under a charter of Henry III, took place on June 1st and 2nd, as usual. But the fair is held in a field, near the railway station, at the other side of the town; the site it has occupied since 1860. Before that date the booths, roundabouts, etc., were set up in the High Street, opposite the church.

"I can only conclude that your correspondent, under the influence of some slight temporary confusion, mistook his right hand for his left, and thus took the wrong turning; afterwards forgetting the direction in which his steps had led him.

"At the same time I find it difficult to understand how your correspondent contrived to confuse the level expanse of the station meadow with the miniature Switzerland of the Burrows."

Very little notice was taken of the Town Clerk's letter, since the controversy had sailed off from particular instances to general principles. Smith might have been mistaken; but, anyhow, that sort of thing was being done all over the country; and was it an infamous scandal, or was it a sign that England was waking up and seeing straight? It made a luxurious and luxuriant quarrel.

At the end, everybody was pleased, even the indignant Town Clerk, for visitors were arriving at Porth in large numbers, and the season promised prosperously. Everybody was pleased — excepting Smith of Wimbledon. The poor man had devoted a week-end to another visit to the town. He had popped out of the train, tired as he was from the long journey, and had made straight for the dunes, as he still called them. There they were, silent in the golden peace of a summer evening; undisturbed, solitary, blest. The feet of Smith pressed on the short, sweet turf, and trod down the fragrant circles of the wild thyme, passed among the burnet roses, passed by pink centaury and tiny eyebright. The sun was sinking, and no breeze stirred, and Smith, standing on one of the highest of the Burrows, saw the sea as a luminous blue jewel. Beneath him, the sand-hills about it, was the green round, where, he could have sworn, and could still swear, he had seen the red brick building, the centre of horrible noise and vulgar gaiety. Indignant in his set conviction, he descended from his height and went exploring in and out among the hills and valleys, expecting every moment to light upon the horror he had witnessed a week or ten days before. There was nothing of the kind to be found; he was forced to admit it. He returned to the town and dined in a state of sullen amazement and then went out and about, and was sly and crafty; asking guileless questions of the policeman, and the barmaids of the Rose and the Red Dragon, and chance passengers on the pavement. "Could you tell me the

way...?"

"Does the Dance Hall on the dunes, the Burrows, stay open...?"

"I suppose the new Dance Hall down on the Burrows is a great success?" — all that sort of clever, detective talk. But without result: people said they didn't know what he was driving at. Smith spent the next day in his traffics and enquiries. He went over the dunes and round the dunes in rings, perplexing the few quiet people who were enjoying the solitude by appearing and reappearing over their lairs. Further enquiries in the town and about it were fruitless. Some people in the lounge of his hotel were discussing the matter, and he listened eagerly, with his face turned away from them. He heard, firstly, that you couldn't believe a word you saw in the papers, and secondly, to his rage, that he, Smith, of Wimbledon, must have been drunk. He came to the conclusion, he was forced to it, that he had been mistaken.

And yet, at breakfast, the next morning, as he mingled his perplexity with coffee and bacon and eggs, he heard a fragment of conversation from two men, pausing for a moment by the open door of the coffee-room. "... infernal row; about two o'clock in the morning."

"You don't say so!"

"Noise like a brass band in full blast woke me up, I tell you. I looked out of my window, and there was some damned *tamasha* going on on the Burrows: all lit up..

The hotel door opened and shut with a crash. Two well-set-up men passed the window by Smith's table. He would have liked to follow and question; but they looked too trim, tweedy, and self-contained for that.

In a cloud of bewilderment he took train from Porth. He never returned; for the summer holiday of the Smiths from that year onwards was spent at some place on the Wash, where it is so bracing.

CHAPTER I

1

IT WAS AT THE END OF A DREARY SPRING DAY when Mr. Lawrence Hillyer came to the uneasy conclusion that something was amiss, and that it was time to pull himself together. It was in May, and summer-time had come in, and the sun should still be shining brightly. But all the day long it had been grey and dismal, with hardly a gleam of sunlight; only now and again a watery light above, and a pallor on grey walls; and the wind blew in gusts, coldish, as if it had been March instead of May. In the middle of the road, in front of Hillyer's rooms, where Layburn Street branched to right and left and became Layburn Square, there was a triangular enclosure of dingy grass and soot-infected beds, where flower-growing had been abandoned many years before, in the seventies perhaps, when the last carriage company abandoned the region. Here, the spotted laurel bushes were at their dreariest, and the blotched boughs of the plane-trees had hardly broken into their sickly yellow buds. The only hope in this horrid patch came from an elder-bush, doubtless a stray chance-comer, which had put on a lively festal green, a witness in the grey heart of London that there was a world of country outside; just as the vine on a neighbouring wall of Pentonville and the great fig-tree that had filled a dank area in the Gray's Inn Road, testified to sunny hills in France and Syrian gardens.

All the weary day with its gloomy heaven and ill wind had been neither good nor bad to Hillyer. He had been deep in books and papers at his old Japanese bureau, and thought no more of the weather than he thought of the golden figures engaged in unintelligible employments in the decorated scheme of the bureau. He had worked all the morning, and had gone out to lunch at an obscure tavern called "The Quill", which lurked in a tortuous passage near at hand, and had returned to his papers and to a long reverie, which was only broken by his landlady bringing up tea. The tea was over, the tray on the sideboard, and the pipe was lit. Hillyer strolled to the window and contemplated the misery and desolation of the scene. It did not move him to despair or to any other emotion, since he did not live in it, but in a secret science of his own making. The thoughtless and inconsiderate have been heard to say that they are hanged if they care if it snows pink. No one credits them; we all know that they would run howling to shelter if such an unlikely phenomenon were manifested; but Hillyer could have taken this oath with truth, if it had occurred to him to take it; which it never did. There are

advantages in living for the most part outside the visible world; though there are, doubtless, items on the other side of the account. And Hillyer, turning from the ashen light of the window, was not so utterly rapt from the phenomenal as not to perceive that the fire was low and near to going out. He bent down to take the shovel and put on more coal, and as he did so a sharp neuralgic pain zigzagged through his head. There was nothing alarming about it; most of us know these occasional momentary pangs that flicker unaccountably over our nerves; and Hillyer, pondering the matter afterwards, decided that he had not been a bit frightened. It was what came next that alarmed him. It was as he dug the shovel into the coal-scuttle, as the black cat asleep on the hearth-rug rose up and hunched its back, as he threw three or four lumps of coal on the fire, that he found himself murmuring: "Black cat... coal-scuttle... shovel... putting coals on the fire... that was exactly what happened... when the Cardinal... when I missed that great chance..." He put the shovel back in its place, and straightened himself. He looked about him, with a dumb, bewildered enquiry. What was he saying, what was he thinking, what was happening? What were these incoherences? What was the connexion between this accustomed and very ordinary action of putting coal on the fire, while a cat sat on the hearth-rug, and the acute sense of a great chance neglected, of a supreme opportunity in life allowed to slip away, unembraced, unused? If he had... uttered some word, performed some action... he knew not what or which... the whole course of his days would have been changed to a vague golden felicity... but... was it an incoherent dream recollected? Had he read of something of the kind?

He slid into the saddle-bag armchair with the doubtful spring, and took up the pipe he had laid on the small table beside him, and sat there, the pipe dangling from his hand, in that state which the Scots call a dwam, in which the mind questions its own authority and its own process, and is ready to deny the evidence that the senses have laid before it. Seeing is no longer believing; not in any subtle, philosophical significance of the words, but in their obvious, everyday meaning; the universe collapses, and returns for a while into its first condition: it is without form and void, and darkness is on the face of the deep. Or if this be all too fine a way of putting it, let us say that there is no sense any more; only nonsense remains. And, perhaps, only those who have endured this experience know that is very awful.

Hillyer sat in his chair trembling a little. The horrid gibberish of cat, coal and cardinal became less vivid and threatening in his mind. He knocked the ash out of his pipe, and began slowly to refill it, and tried to collect himself. The suggested image is near enough to the facts of the case. Hillyer, sitting in his room on that dreary evening in the May of'29, might well be compared to a jigsaw puzzle that has been broken up and scattered abroad. The intelligible whole had been shattered; the parts that made it up, severally meaningless nonsense, were here, there, and everywhere in amorphous

confusion. He tried to gather them together to collect them, and for some time with poor enough success. Life seemed to have become all misty, uncertain; his own identity was blurred in his mind. There were things to be done, he knew, but he could not say for the moment exactly what they were; he saw neither the days behind with their finished work nor the tasks and interests of the days that were to come; he was pretty much, mentally, in the condition of a man in a thick London fog, whose own doorstep has been transmuted into a monstrous unfamiliarity, before whom open gulfs and caverns of smoking terror — where the streets and shops had been in the morning. It is a horrid state; summed up for common use in the familiar phrase, "suffering from loss of memory," lest the true description, loss of *ego,* loss of true being, should confuse and alarm. Hillyer certainly wondered what he was doing in his own sitting-room, and wondered, further, where he would get if he went out and turned to right or left. He confessed to himself that he didn't know. A heavy bewilderment clouded his mind all the rest of the evening. He read a little without making much of what he read; he looked through a notebook and grasped the points and questions that he had set down very dimly, as if he were poking into another man's work, and trying to appreciate interests that were foreign to him. He took something hot last thing, but slept ill enough in spite of his dose.

2

The trouble was, very likely, due to over absorption in a singular enquiry, immensely aggravated by isolation. Scholars, men of research, high-priests of science are usually gregarious, both in body and mind. Very often, as Sidney Dobell said of poets, they grow in clumps, like primroses; they have their centres in the college, the university, the learned society, and medical school. If these people of the mind are merely men of letters, they are apt to meet one another in clubs and drawing rooms; and for one reason or another they generally keep in touch with the main currents of life. Hillyer had gone another way; he had fallen out of the march, and had loft sight of his fellow-travellers. He was fifty-five and for thirty years he had been growing more and more a solitary. His relations in the country were all dead. His early friends — they were not many — had set to work, married, gone to China and California. Hillyer had a small income, and not entering any business, made no new friends or connexions, and, perhaps, he lacked the sociable habit of mind, as he certainly lacked the equally valuable habit of being interested, if but mildly, in matters which interested the mass of his fellow-creatures. Now and then, in his early days in London, he found himself in company — and invariably wondered what he did there. When people meet, there is always something of a simple game at ball, and most of us who miss one ball make a fair catch of another. Now, when a lady asked Hillyer what he thought of

Polenska's new dance, he didn't know what he thought, for he had never seen it. Very well; but he was just as bad when a man asked him what he thought of Chamberlain now. And, then, in literary society, the talk of "rates per thou", and "£500 down on account of royalties" failed to move him: he didn't care; and we know that "Don't Care" was eaten by lions. It is possible that these lions had begun to snuff the track of Hillyer on that cold May evening. At all events, it is clear that he had not the social gift which is the capacity for being interested, or simulating interest — it doesn't matter which — in all the small change that passes in company. And, it could not be said that, even if he had possessed the necessary confidence, he was in a position to make conversation out of his own topics. He was in the beginning of his researches, treading doubtfully in a dubious region, wondering as to whether he were on the right way, wondering sometimes whether there were a way at all. As to his secret science, he was much in the position of Ashmole as to other secret sciences: he knew enough to hold his tongue, but not enough to speak. He had made an entry in one of his first notebooks.

"I am moved to wonder, whether what we call 'fairy-tales' do not, in fact, contain a strange wisdom and the secrets of a very strange and mysterious psychology. Take the old tale of the fairy gold and its transmutation into ugly rubbish, as an example. To most of us it is a tale and nothing more than a tale; without any reason, without any meaning, without any sort of sense or significance in it. We accept it just as a piece of picturesque fancy and nothing more; the turning of the magic gold into dry leaves was just a happy notion of the unknown and remote individual who made up the story. But suppose that there is something more than this; rather, something quite different from this? Is it possible that there is, now and then, a more hidden and interior sense in some of the tales of the fairylands and the fairies? I am inclined to think that this may be so; that the stories are — occasionally, not always by any means — the veils of certain rare interior experiences of mankind; dangerous experiences, perhaps. The gold faded into dead leaves; it may be more than a pretty story.

"And the way to find the Fairy Queen — *in occlusum Regina palatium*?"

Now that sort of thing may be sense or nonsense; but it is, clearly, not the current coinage of general conversation. Anyhow, there is no need to enquire into the value of Hillyer's researches; but being absorbed in them, and sometimes visited by gleams of a light in which he hardly dared believe, it is not much wonder that he gradually drew apart from the crowd, and became a hermit, a solitary, in the midst of myriads. At first he had rooms in Little Russell Street, quiet and handy for the Museum Reading Room; but he felt rather than saw that Bloomsbury had changed and was changing every day, that dimness was departing from it, that it began to glitter and to shine and to

be manifested. He withdrew himself. He had the habit of aimless walking, finding out by instinct quiet places fit for his strange meditations, and had thus discovered the unknown region that lies beyond the Gray's Inn Road: a world where only the unknown live, which never gets into the papers, which is never traversed by steps familiar with Piccadilly and Kensington. He found out rooms on the height of Layburn Street facing the dank enclosure of spotted laurels and blotched plane-trees. Nothing has been altered in this quarter for eighty or ninety years; Hillyer felt himself at ease in it, and lapsed into deeper, stranger dreams.

3

They were roughly broken by the unpleasant experience that came upon him so suddenly. This was the intrusion of a very different order from that to which he was accustomed. There was something physically wrong; and he went the next day to Dr. Flanagan, whose brass plate he had often observed in Layburn Square. The doctor, a cheerful man, listened to the symptoms and shook his head.

"Indeed, all that's not much in my way," he said, very frankly. "It's your nerves that are all wrong, and we don't have much to do with nerves in this part of the world. I'll send you to a specialist, but first I'll just give you a sedative that'll make you feel more comfortable."

Whereupon, the amazed Hillyer was taken into a sitting-room, furnished in the seventies of the last century, and given Irish whiskey hot, with sugar, at eleven o'clock in the morning; the doctor joining him. ' The specialist was interested, and a little alarming. He spoke of the dangers of continued solitude. "I had chambers in Gray's Inn when I was a young man, and there were men there that had got into the habit of living alone: they mostly ended with suicide. Just as it is in Dickens; he knew the Inns. A wonderful observer, Dickens, whatever the young people may say.

"Well, you've been living a great deal too much alone, and I gather you don't get about much, and don't go in for any outside interests or amusements, and the result is that you're getting jumpy. If you aren't careful you'll begin to see things, and that won't do at all. You want change — change of air, change of scene, change of habit, change of everything. So the sooner you get out of town, the better."

The doctor advised sea air, preferably in the west. Hillyer remembered going with his parents to Porth when he was a small boy; and so he stood in the golden sunlight over the sea in the calm evenings, and it may well be that he and Mr. Smith passed each other in the streets of Porth.

4

At the end of a week Hillyer felt distinctly the better for the change. He sat on the sands, and listened to the chatter of the children, of their fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers and nurses. He heard the tones of Manchester and Birmingham, of the London suburb with its curious compound vowels, listening with rapt attention to the manner in which the simple "me" was enriched to "mah-eh-ee" in a wonderful fashion. And as a relief, came the chant of the native speech, a rich melody, a relic of the age when all speech was song. He would stroll up and down, making his way between sand-castles with their flooded moats, children dancing in rings as they came out of the sea, and earnest men talking of cotton; getting as much noise and chatter into his ears as he could, feeling that to be the best remedy for the deep silence in which he had lived so long. In the hotel smoking-room in the evening he did his best to break himself into the habit of speech, and to amend the errors of his youth. He tried his utmost to answer the question that he had refused in his earlier years: "What do you think of Chamberlain now?" It was a different Chamberlain, but Hillyer read — with pain it must be confessed — all the leading articles every morning directly after breakfast, and was able to say a few words in the evening on the subject of derating to Mr. Sykes, a pleasant man from the north; though he felt strongly inclined to quote Mr. Cleaver, in *Our Mutual Friend*: "'Deration, oh, don't." There were all sorts of topics, he found, which he could acquire by a careful study of the paper; and he got them up as well as he could, though he found it almost impossible at his age to acquire the complicated technique of the racing news. But as he advanced in his studies he began to be seriously interested, and found that even here there were minor mysteries that entertained him. For example, he was sitting one evening with Mr and Mrs. Sykes in the hotel lounge over coffee and cigarettes. After some cogitation he thought of a brilliant opening and asked Mrs. Sykes about her jewelled pipes.

"What on earth are you talking about? "said Mrs. Sykes, in a state of amazement; and Hillyer explained, abashed a little, that he had read only that morning in the woman's page of a popular paper, that fashionable women were all smoking briar pipes heavily jewelled, and that rubies and emeralds were the most popular combination. The lady laughed and told him that nobody paid any attention to that nonsense— "except very young typists, perhaps, and they may try to believe in it." Then there was another party, with a very pretty dark daughter in it. He asked her why she hadn't painted her caste-mark on her forehead; and was horrified at the storm of fury which burst from her father, General Clinton, who had served for many years in India. Yet Hillyer had seen a paragraph to the effect that with smart women the caste-mark on the forehead had become a craze. He apologised humbly to the lady and her father; but putting two and two together, he came to the most interesting conclusion that a great part of the daily paper dealt with a world of

pure fiction, reporting its news with all the gravity of one who deals with the plain and common facts of life. Women did not smoke jewelled briars, they did not paint Hindoo caste-marks on their brows, they did not clothe their legs and feet with gold-leaf in place of stockings. The reason of these strange inventions puzzled Hillyer profoundly; they seemed to him shapes in a magic lantern show; and, passing to the "Personal" column, he carried his new scepticism so far as to doubt the very existence of Captain "Sam" Hurlingham and Lady "Billy" Donkin, who were always being seen lunching together at the Grandeur. If he had ever thought of the mysteries as things hidden away and apart, remote from the general stream of life, he saw now that he was mistaken. The mysteries were part of the very tissue and being of man; they were not to be avoided. The quest for that which was concealed by the golden and jewelled world of the *Arabian Nights* was conducted in the columns of the daily press: behind Persian lattice-work, in a tiled court, deep azure, where the music of falling water rang from the fountain, he saw the appearance of the dark lady with the jewelled pipe, the caste-mark on her forehead, her feet gleaming golden on the rose-marble floor.

Hillyer shook his head; these images were leading him back to old and too familiar ground: he had come to Porth to escape from dreams, not to cherish them. He directed his attention to the League of Nations, to Unemployment, to the Indian troubles, to the Labour Policy, to the Problems of Canada and Australia. He borrowed solid novels from the Library, and read them with infinite satisfaction and benefit, since they seemed to him more free than the daily record of the press from the elements which he recognised as dangerous — during the period of his cure, at all events. They shut out wonder from their picture of existence; they gave him the rest that would be afforded by an old, terraced, brick-walled garden to a man who has been in peril in a land of rocks and desert places. So the treatment went on prosperously; and Hillyer never failed to attend the performances of the excellent town orchestra — not the jazz band of Smith's fevered imagination — which played twice daily. He was not a learned lover of good music, but he recognised the enormous benefit of listening to it. For the one sure effect: of all music good or bad is to destroy thought for the time being. It is comparatively easy to think in mere noise: a man will soon accustom himself to the jar and jangle of trams, the rattle of passing trains, the song that the sirens sing down by the docks, the hubbub of a busy street, the loud brisk squabbles of the slum round the corner. He can look for the fifth figure in Logic in the midst of all this, invent an original plot for a detective story, or plan a poem and write it. But when music — sound in order and rhythm — is heard, thought is forthwith extinguished. The quality of the music has nothing to do with this effect of it, which will be produced as surely by a Bach fugue as by the silliest song of the Halls or the cabarets. Hillyer found the two hours spent daily in listening to the Porth orchestra a most valuable part of his course; since it was a two hours abstinence from thinking, of immersion in an

element which negatived thought.

5

For some weeks Hillyer, remembering the doctor's warnings against the solitary habit, kept well in touch with company. If the weather were wet, he frequented the lounge of his hotel, first reading the papers and then discussing the news with any acquaintance who seemed ready for conversation. If it were fine, there was a little garden across the road reserved for the hotel guests and pleasantly provided with deckchairs. Here, sitting in comfort, well in the world of the living, he smoked and played the game at Lords', or trembled at the situation in the Balkans, and gazed out on the glittering waters of the bay, and the coast curving round to the Dragon's Head in the east. Everyday, he felt better, renewed in body and spirit; and he became confident; he began to go farther afield, to walk along the cliffs one day, to lose himself in deep inland lanes on another. And then he discovered the attraction of the dunes, of their sand mountains, of their valleys of flowery turf and of wild thyme in purple circles of bloom. The desire of this region grew upon him, and by degrees he spent more and more of his time in wandering in and out among the hills of sand, in taking his place in the green round that Mr. Smith had once frequented. There was a ledge of turf on one side of this place that made an easy seat. There was solitude without desolation; every now and again explorers like himself would pass by, delay a little and look about them, botanise, and go onwards in search of an appetite for lunch or dinner. Hillyer began to be conscious that the Labour Policy, the situation in Australia, and the economics of the Balkans, had served their turn; he was glad to be silent, and yet to see that his fellows were at hand. There was a charm about this hollow, with its glimpse of blue sea and a misty coast far away, seen through a cleft in the sandhills, that won him more and more; and hour after hour, he would delay here, morning and evening. He felt that his health was quite restored, that his nerves were in splendid order; but he could not make up his mind to leave these happy shores for the grey lodgings on the grim hillside in desert London. It was an obscure set of circumstances, that at last made up his mind for him, and sent him hurrying back to town in a very pitiable state of terror and bewilderment. In a way, it all began with the story of a missing woman, though this business and its ending were rather of the accidents not of the essence of Hillyer's trouble.

The case was thus. A few miles from Porth, going eastward, the coast rises slowly from the sea into high sloping land covered with heather. Here and there on these heights clearings have been made, and two or three white farmhouses face the sea and the cliffs on which Porth stands. Hillyer, sitting in the little hotel garden, had often rejoiced in the sight of the white walls, shining in the sun, amidst their few fields of corn and meadows of rough

pasture, islands with the heathery steeps all about them and dividing them from one another. To him, looking across the sea, the farms seemed close enough together; but, in fact, each was separated from its nearest neighbour by at least a mile of steep ascent and descent, through rough land, difficult walking, and the best way little better than a sheep track. In one of these lonely farms, with the odd name of Ty Captain (which means Captain's House), there was living a man named Prothero with his wife and two children, a boy and girl of eight and eleven. Mrs. Prothero was a handsome, red-cheeked, black-haired woman of thirty or a little over.

Early one Saturday morning, about a fortnight before Hillyer's visit, Mrs. Prothero set out for market at Porth, her basket, with a couple of fowls and some eggs, on her arm.

She took her usual way, which was the only way; the rough track through the heather that trailed across the hillside, then down on the other side by a farm road, and so to the main road and St. Fagan's station, about ten miles from Porth, and between two and three miles from Ty Captain farm. Her husband saw her climbing up the path as he stood by the garden gate, and then he went to his work in the fields, and thought no more of her till the evening. The time passed by and she did not return; Prothero and the children waited by the gate till it grew dark, and she did not come. The man told the frightened children some story about their mother staying with her friend, Mrs. Evans at Porth, and got them hot milk and sent them off to bed. He put the lamp in the window and kept watch all night. Two or three times he took his lantern and went out on the track that his wife had taken; looking to left and right into the black darkness; stopping, calling her name, and then going on a little, and calling again. The only thing that he could think was that she had slipped and fallen and broken a leg, and was now lying helpless in the heather. There was no answer to his shouts, his lantern shewed him nothing but the wild growth; and he went back to the farm hoping that, somehow or other, he might find her there. As soon as it was light he took the two children and set out for St. Fagan's. He knocked up the people at the first house he passed, told them his story and left the children in their care. Then, at St. Fagan's, he woke the station-master — there were no trains till the afternoon on Sundays — and heard that Mrs. Prothero had not been seen at the station the day before; the station-master had thought she must be ill, since she took the 8.40 for Porth every Saturday. Prothero got a lift in a car and went to the police at Porth. The usual thing followed; search-parties, official and unofficial, the "missing" broadcast, the summons of Scotland Yard, vain clues that led nowhere, idle theories that led to the combing of Camden Town, and a sharp look-out at Northampton. A month after Mrs. Prothero's disappearance her body, shamefully torn and mutilated, was found hidden in a dense thicket of blackthorn about a hundred yards from the farm-track that went to the main road and the station. The poor woman's murderer was never discovered; he

had left no trace behind him, save his horrible violence; there was no thread for the police to hold or follow. The case of Mrs. Prothero simply went down on the tolerably long list of undiscovered murders; there was nothing to be done or said.

Nothing, indeed, to be said in reason; but horrors make many people hysterical and therefore highly unreasonable; and the people at Porth, both the natives and the visitors talked an incredible amount of nonsense about the murder. And their nonsense affected Hillyer in a very strange manner. Though, if we begin to talk of strangeness...

Hillyer was not what is called, I believe, a noticing man. He had roused himself so far that he was ready to take part in the casual conversation of the hotel lounge or the sands; he no longer hid himself away from his fellow-men. But he stood on no watch-tower, and kept no sharp look-out; he was not curious in minute shades of manner, nor ready to deduce this or that from the raising of an eyebrow or the compression of a lip. He was not acutely interested in any of the agreeable chance acquaintances he had made; and so for some time he failed to perceive that anything was amiss. And then, after four or five days, during which a sharper, or perhaps, a more deeply interested man, would have scented something a little queer in the social air, Hillyer did begin to be aware of a difference. People were distinctly less genial where he was concerned. The hitherto friendly groups on the sands answered his greetings drily. If he attempted to discuss the architecture of sand castles with the builders, there was apt to be a cry from a deck-chair: “Peter, Betty! come here for a minute; I want you.” He found that his approach was apt to break up the small after-dinner circles of the lounge; Mrs. Sykes would remind Mr. Sykes that they had arranged to stroll to the Black Rock before it got dark; and General Clinton, though he had seemed to forgive the caste-mark business, glared and said nothing. Once or twice, perceiving that a brisk and eager conversation became an awkward silence on his approach, he guessed that he had been the subject of the talk; and wondered, but not very much. If he supposed anything, he supposed that these people, having given him a fair trial, found him dull company, and were happier among themselves with their own interests. He had no objection to this, no defence to make: very likely they were right. It was only when Bradshaw, the analytical chemist from Birmingham, addressed him one day as he was coming back to lunch after a morning spent in the green round of the Burrows, that he began to wonder seriously, and to ask himself what was amiss. Bradshaw was waiting for him at the top of the flight of steps leading from the sands and the Burrows to the Front, or Esplanade. He looked very oddly at Hillyer, though Hillyer noted nothing of this.

“I saw you on the Burrows, just now,” he remarked.

“Yes,” replied Hillyer cheerfully, “I spend a lot of time there. I like it.”

“But what have you done with your friend? Why don’t you bring him along to the Dragon?” Hillyer stared at Bradshaw.

“Friend,” said he, “... friend? I beg your pardon... friend... done with my friend? I am very sorry, but I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You don’t? Very good,” and Bradshaw walked away without more words, leaving Hillyer confused and a little troubled. He sat down for a few minutes on one of the seats on the front, and wondered what Bradshaw was driving at with this talk of “your friend”. He could make nothing of it, and went on to his lunch at the Red Dragon. He entered the coffee-room and took his usual place at a small table by one of the windows; and was perplexed anew as he noticed that his entrance made a distinct sensation and by no means an agreeable one. Bradshaw was talking eagerly to some friends at the other side of the room. They leaned across the table, evidently so that they might miss nothing, and one of them looked towards Hillyer with a glance of great abhorrence. And afterwards he saw a shade of much the same kind on many faces, as he went through the lounge into the street. He met it again, two or three hours later. He was sitting on the ledge of turf in his favourite hollow in the Burrows, still feeling a little upset, and vastly puzzled, by what had happened in the morning, when glancing up, he saw a man named Davies, another acquaintance of the hotel, standing on the sandy height opposite, and staring towards him with an extraordinary intentness. There was violent dislike and amazement too, and something of fear in the man’s expression. Hillyer gaped at him blankly for a few moments, and then called out, to break the scene: “Why don’t you come down here? Very pleasant in the shade.” Davies opened his mouth to speak, and then turned and hurried away towards the town, looking backward once, with dread in his gaze, with an awful surmise written on his countenance. That night the people in the hotel threw away ceremony and form, and cut Hillyer to his face. The next morning, Poggi, the manager, beckoned him into the office, and expressed his regret that No. 23 was booked in advance from that date onward, and wished he had not forgotten to mention the fact on Hillyer’s arrival.

“There is something the matter,” said Hillyer. “Of course, I shall make no trouble about going. But, in strict confidence, tell me what it is all about. I shall be very much obliged, if you will.”

Poggi raised his broad and benignant shoulders, and began to do wonderful things with the fingers of his left hand.

“Not a word, no? Good. I think they are mad; but they say you are a friend of that murderer of the woman Prothero; that you are hiding him, and that very likely you will hang also. I know they are mad; but— “ and the fingers and the hand executed an amazing fantasia in the air.

Hillyer packed his bag, paid his bill, and left the hotel ten minutes later. He saw the half-dozen people who were about eyeing him curiously and furiously, and he took his way at a brisk pace towards the station; the morning train for Paddington was due in twenty minutes. He walked on to the platform — the station was an open one — bought a paper at the bookstall, and paced up and down in sight of everyone.

Passengers for London thickened about him; huge piles of luggage were piled up at intervals on the platform; then when the train came in, country people who were going to the market poured out of the carriages, obstructing the entrance of those who were Paddington bound, and burned for corner places facing the engine. In the midst of all this confusion, Hillyer stole out of the station by a side path, and fetching a compass, made his way to a second-rate street at the back of the town, and secured two small rooms without difficulty. He thought it most unlikely that the people in this obscure street would know his face or be familiar with the rumours of the Red Dragon on the front; and he wanted to lie latent for a day or two, that he might study his problem in peace, and see if he could discover any materials for its solution. For three days he lay snug and hidden; perplexed and pondering, and quite unable to pitch on any explanation that was at all tolerable to his common-sense. He had a bad half-hour soon after he was established in his retreat, for, looking at certain strange and terrifying pictures confronting him, in which moonlight was indicated by an inlay of mother-of-pearl, it suddenly struck him that he must be suffering from delusions, that the change of air and scene had failed to effect a cure of his nervous trouble, and that all the alarms of the last few days were figments of his disordered brain. But he cast this from him. At times, every man is infallible, and, in spite of philosophic doubts, is able to say “I know.” You cannot, for instance, persuade a country farmer who has been going to market every Saturday for thirty or forty years that he is uncertain as to market day: on that point at least he is ready with fast assurance to defy all the schools of the sceptics. He knows. So Hillyer knew that he had been confronted with facts, not fancies; and with this moderate satisfaction he was left to find out what these facts signified. Looking back he made his calculation: first of all, as he saw now more clearly than he had done at the time, the friendly people of the hotel had begun to edge off from his company, to make excuses for retreat when he appeared, to become deaf when he spoke of lawn tennis, or the Labour policy, or the Balkans. Then, there had been that Birmingham chemist, who asked him what he had done with his friend; why he didn’t bring his friend to the Dragon. He could find no explanation of these extraordinary questions. There was something offensive, almost threatening about the man’s manner; for this he could find no explanation. And then, as he sat alone in the peaceful circle of the green amphitheatre, Davies appearing on the sandy summit staring at him aghast, in

horror, and making off in frightened haste; here again he came dead against a blank wall. And as for the manager of the hotel, and his talk of hiding the Ty Captain murderer, what on earth could that mean? So far as Hillyer could see, it implied, first of all that the police had made up their minds as to the identity of the murderer, that they were unable to lay hands on the suspect, and that, somehow or other — he could not conceive how — these transitory birds, these visitors, his fellow-guests at the hotel, knew the supposed miscreant, and had seen him in Hillyer's company. All of which was a string of nonsense, and absolutely intolerable.

It would still have been intolerable; but the burden would have been lightened a little, if Hillyer's newspaper studies had been more thorough and more prolonged. He would have been familiar with certain processes of the public mind when confronted with a murder mystery; his recollections would have furnished him with many enlightening instances and examples. An old woman is murdered in her sweet shop: Mrs. Bunkin, which clear starches, is sure to come forward and describe a man with a black moustache, in a blue serge suit, who was loafing about the street between eleven and twelve. The supposed villain turns out to be a builder in a small way, who had an appointment with a bookmaker; but Mrs. Bunkin is convinced to the end that he was the very murderer. She felt, at the time, she says, that he was up to no good, and that is considered conclusive evidence. That is the way it is done, and if Hillyer had been acquainted with the method he might have guessed at the manner in which one of the minor links in his puzzle was forged. There had been muttered confabulations in snug corners of the Dragon: "one of the most horrible-looking fellows I've ever seen,"

"made my blood run cold,"

"something quite ghastly about him,"

"my notion of a murderer,"

"a dwarf, you said?"

"Yes, but those deformed creatures are often tremendously strong: looked as if murder would be child's play to him" — and so forth and so forth; and after two or three such conferences, the unknown was firmly established as the Ty Captain murderer. Still, if Hillyer had divined all this it would not have helped him much as to the major problem. He had not been in company with anyone during his stay at Porth, excepting these hotel people, who had become rabid; and so... It was impossible to finish the sentence.

On the fourth day, Hillyer emerged from his retreat. Meditation had done nothing to elucidate the dark riddle that perplexed him; he would try action, if going abroad and shewing himself could be called action. He walked up and down the town, strolled about the sands, and sat on the front gazing blandly out to sea. He met two or three of his former associates of the Dragon.

They stared at him amazed, threatening, furious; stopped dead, as if stricken suddenly, glared helpless astonishment. Hillyer was as if he saw them not, passed and repassed, and betook himself, after his usual routine, to the green round in the Burrows. He repeated these proceedings after lunch, taking some pains as to his goings and comings, so that possible sleuths, watchers and trackers of the company of the Red Dragon might be thrown off the scent. The next day he followed the same procedure; and in the late afternoon, when the wind fell, he thought, as he sat on his seat in the green round that he could distinguish stealthy rustlings in the coarse grass that grew about the encircling dunes; and once or twice, keeping a sharp look-out, he noted appearances that were neither grass nor sand. He guessed that prone watchers, half buried in sand, were observing him all the while. "And the devil knows why," he said to himself.

The next morning the crisis came. He had been sitting for an hour or more in the usual place, and the sunlight and blue sky, and the faint breeze from the east was so enchanting that he had almost forgotten the maniacs that beset his ways. It was fortunate that his stay at Porth had really and effectively restored the apparatus of his nerves. There was a sudden shrill excruciating whistle: from every tussock in the circle of the dunes a man shot up, raging, and then flung himself headlong down the slope. In an instant Hillyer, stupid with surprise, found himself in the midst of a circle of men, shouting, foaming, cursing, yelling incoherences. Two of them had poured down at his back and held him tightly, one on each arm; and then, as suddenly as it rose, the tumult died away, and stupefaction and silence fell upon this strange assembly. They glared at Hillyer, they glared at one another. There were about a dozen of them. Some of them Hillyer recognised as his former acquaintances of the Red Dragon. Davies and Bradshaw held him by the arms. There was General Clinton, open eyed, open-mouthed staring at him; there was the face of Sykes, as of one confounded; a man named Sullivan held a heavy cane above his head, as if it were a broad-sword in a stage combat. Others he had seen on the sands; some faces were altogether strange to him; and all of them, in furious action and furious utterance a moment before, now stood silent, motionless, frozen in sheer amazement; as their faces declared.

The General at last found speech:

"Hold him tight," he said to Hillyer's guards, "or he'll get away like the other. Take him a few yards off, you fellows; there's some infernal hanky-panky here. There must be a trap-door hidden in the turf, and we've got to find it."

One man had a stick with a long iron ferule. Under the General's direction, he poked and prodded the bank of turf where Hillyer had been sitting, and the turf all around. The stick went in easily; there was hardly more than an inch of soil over a depth of sand. Others climbed the banks and looked round and about, in the hopes of seeing a creeping or a flying figure. The

General marched up and down, stamping at intervals; he would be able to detect a hollow beneath. There was a thick growth of brambles in one spot; it was all beaten down to the sand in no time. The poking, prodding, beating, stamping went on for twenty minutes.

"Stop!" the General called out. "They're too many for us. I never saw the Rope Trick. I never believed in it. I always thought it was a damned lie. This is worse. Let that fellow go; we can't do anything to him."

And then, after a pause:

"But, by God! I saw that infernal, murdering scoundrel with my own eyes."

He turned and walked away towards the town, and the others followed him in dead silence.

Hillyer was left standing; he also said nothing. He had no notion of threatening an action for assault and violent constraint; it did not occur to him to demand a humble apology from General Clinton, from Davies, from Bradshaw, from the whole pack of them. Utter stupor overwhelmed him and pressed down his tongue like the great ox of the Greek proverb. The actions and the words of these raging people gave him some inkling of his supposed offences; in a way his problem was answered; but the answer was worse than the enigma; in itself an enigma and a chaos.

"And I haven't the remotest notion what has happened," that was all he could find to say to himself, as he in his turn walked away from this scene of a wild experience. But he decided that any benefit that Porth could give him was exhausted; and he left the town by the earliest possible train, glad to think of the refuge awaiting him on the remoter side of the Gray's Inn Road.

He settled down peacefully to his old routine and scheme of daily life. In spite of the unpleasantness which had spoilt the end of his visit, he was glad he had made it, since it had opened his eyes to the significance of the daily paper, a source of information he had hitherto scandalously neglected. He recalled now, with a free mind, those mysterious news items concerning jewelled pipes, Hindu caste-marks, gilded feet. Immediately on his return he gave an order to the local newsagent to send him two popular papers every day; and he was overjoyed to read at once in one of them the remarkable intelligence that the "lastest fad of the Seaside Girl" was to enamel her toe-nails in brilliant colours. The other paper reported that one of the smartest women in society had been seen wearing a fez at lunch. All this struck Hillyer as most important. The idea evidently was, as he had seen from the first, to suggest the gorgeous symbolism of the *Arabian Nights;* that great vision of a world which all men desire, to which few attain. Here, indeed, were "fairy-tales" of profound significance.

CHAPTER II

1

HILLYER DID NOT INTEND TO LAPSE INTO HIS former state of dark absorption in his studies, meditations and researches. The odd seizure that had befallen him, and the grave warning of the nerve specialist, had not failed of their effect; he made up his mind to go warily and take care of his paths for the future. He would give the evening and perhaps a goodly portion of the night to his work; in the morning he would stir about and move with men, and survey the infinite world of London: in itself, as he reflected, the study of a lifetime. No longer a self-sentenced prisoner in the narrow compass of his lodgings, he began to discover what strange regions might be reached by the wise expenditure of a few pence on an omnibus ride. Nay, to turn a corner, or to take a way hitherto neglected, might unlock the doors of a new region; and he was reminded of one of the old tales that were the subject of his constant meditations — the story of the man who, passing along some street that he has trodden a hundred times, sees a door before unnoticed, and opening it enters a world of marvel and strange experience, that has been unsuspected but close at hand all his days. On one of these voyages through the ocean of myriad-streeted London, he came one day upon a little square or oasis of greenery in the very heart of a grey and dismal quarter. The racket of King's Cross was not far off, trams jangled near at hand, and a cloud of depression hung like a mist on the surrounding streets. But Belmore Square had lived on from another age. It was composed of little two-storied houses, on whose walls the vine and the fig-tree mingled and brought Syria to the heart of London; and each little house had its little garden, with palings of faded green, and flowers fit for cottage gardens by a country lane. In the green centre, the town supremacy of the plane was disputed by the mystic ash, by wych elm, by birch and hornbeam, and in their shade were a few seats, on which a few old people sat when the sun shone. Hillyer came round a corner that he had never turned before, and saw the green and the quiet of the place and delighted in it. He made a perambulation, wondered who were so fortunate as to enjoy this humble peace and pleasantness, and sat down to smoke beneath green boughs for half an hour or more, then passed on his way. He had been gone five minutes when two old men who had been sitting on a bench at the upper end of the enclosure began to discourse:

"That was a queer-looking customer," said old Tom Bryce.

"Who was that then?" asked old Sam Simmons.

"Why, him down over on the seat opposite, that's just gone."

"The one in grey clothes? I didn't see anything very queer about him.

Quiet-looking man; might be a schoolmaster, I should say."

"I don't mean him. I mean the little chap sitting by him."

"I never saw anyone sitting by him."

"Of course you did; how could you help seeing of him?"

"Well, I didn't see him."

"Do you mean to tell me, you sitting there next to me, at my elbow, as you might say, you say you didn't see that short chap, sitting on that bench, over there, not so much as forty foot off from where us two are sitting now? Don't talk such nonsense, Sam Simmons."

"Don't you talk nonsense then. There was that quiet grave sort of gentleman, like a schoolmaster, or you might say a man who might have retired from something; might have been a clerk who'd come into a bit of money from what I could see; very nice grey suit of clothes he was wearing. There he was sitting and he put on his pipe, and he looked pleased with himself. And he's the only man I see, or you either, if it comes to that."

Mr. Bryce stared at his old friend in angry amazement. He called down a meaningless curse upon himself, and continued his argument:

"Now, are you sure we mean the same seat? I mean that bench, over there, opposite, under that tree with spiky leaves. And there's white chalk-marks on the top of the back of the bench on the left hand. Do you see what I tell you?"

"Yes, I do; as plain as I see you. I've got eyes in my head. I can see that bench all right. What about it?"

"I'll tell you. There was two men sitting on that bench not ten minutes ago."

"I say there was one man, and no more than one."

"There was two, I tell you. There was that quiet-looking man in the grey suit you've been gassing about; and there was another small man sitting a foot off him, or thereabouts. A foot, you might say, or it might be a foot and a half. But not two foot."

"So there was another man, was there? And what sort of a man might he be, as you saw him so plain?"

"Well, that's the funny thing," said Brice, soothed by what he considered old Sam's admission. He pondered.

"It is a funny thing," he went on, after consideration of the case, "I saw him, as I tell you, as plain as I see you now. But if you ask me what he was like..."

"Of course I ask you. You saw him plain, didn't you?"

"I did see him plain. No doubt about it. But there's some people... well, you know them all right when you see them, and yet it's hard to say how you know them, if you take my meaning. Now, there's Harry Jackson. You know Harry Jackson in the Caledonian Road? Next door to Puller's coffeehouse?"

"Never mind about him. I know him. I want to hear about this other chap that you say you see sitting over there just opposite."

"Well, that's a difficult proposal. It isn't so easy as it sounds, not by a long way. You know the Private Bar at the Belmore; but I daresay you might find it not so easy to hit it off so that another man would recognise it as soon as he went in."

"If you saw this man at all, you can tell what you saw. That's what I say."

Old Mr. Bryce was profoundly disturbed. He wagged his short white beard from side to side. He tried to speak, but gibbered meaningless syllables. At last, "I did see him, I'll take my oath, and there was something wrong about him, and I'm blest if I can tell you any more than that."

Sam Simmons looked at his old friend with some apprehension in his glance.

"Come along," he said. "Them children will be swarming out of school in a minute and I don't want to listen to their noise. What about a pint at the Belmore? There's chop toad at Puller's. Saw it up in the window as I went by this morning."

They went off together. Old Bryce's face was working, and he looked nervously away as they passed the bench with the chalk-marks on its back.

2

Twenty-nine, Layburn Street, Hillyer's abode, was a very quiet house. In the basement, the landlady, Mrs. Jolly, and her daughter, a young woman of twenty or a little more or a little less, dwelt in a gentle gloom; on the ground floor there was a middle-aged clerk, who got up early in the morning and made off for somewhere in the far east, down by the docks. Hillyer had the first floor, and the two rooms above held two young men who followed skilled crafts in Soho workshops. One was supposed to be a bookbinder, the other a worker in gold and silver; but this was more conjecture and doubtful rumour than ascertained fact. There was no bond that held the inhabitants of the house together; they were all quiet, keeping little company and never banging doors. The two craftsmen strolled in and out of each other's rooms sometimes of an evening; and Hillyer and the clerk just knew each other by sight, after the passage of a good many years. Once upon a time, more than

twenty years before, there had been a reveller on the ground floor, who had gathered his young friends about him once or twice, and had endeavoured to revive the tradition of the late-sitting, jovial party with an occasional chorus. But he was given to understand that doings forbidden in the green tree of Mrs. Raddle were anathema in the dry day of Mrs. Jolly. He slunk away: to look for Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen possibly in another world; and since his exit peace had reigned profound on every landing.

That peace was broken, and with it the heavy moonless silence of a summer night, not long after Hillyer's return from his seaside visit. It was on the stroke of two in the morning, as afterwards appeared, that a tremendous crash rent the air. The day had been faint with burning heavy heat, and the little breeze that had sprung up at sunset had died away. Leaden clouds covered the sky and shut in the hot breath of the innumerable streets. A man strolling up Layburn Street, seeking perhaps for fresh air on the eminences of Sadlers Wells and Islington, stopped a moment, lit a match and watched the flame burn without quivering. Even in that region where old fashions linger, where forgotten prints hang on the walls, where lustres are common enough, and at least one example of the right Victorian wax-flowers school has been observed; even there windows had been thrown open and suffered to stay open, in spite of the general belief in the mysterious venoms of the air of night.

The roar of London has long ceased to exist. It was dead silence, or all but dead silence. A late car or taxi in the Gray's Inn Road, a late footfall on a distant pavement made no more sound than a stirring of leaves before a feeble momentary breath of wind, or the patter of a few scarce drops of rain on a laurel bush. And then, a tremendous splintering crash tore the stillness into tatters; and on it fell the two broken thunders of Big Ben.

After this, there was a pause of a few seconds. Thereupon, the confused noise of people jumping out of bed, pattering over the floor, stumbling and fumbling on their way to the gas, upsetting chairs and small tables: *fragor et strepitus.* The clerk on the ground floor woke up with a sonorous shout, as though he occupied his business in deep waters, instead of in a warehouse near the Docks. One of the young men on the top floor opened his door and made a Slavonic noise. Mrs. Jolly left her daughter trembling in bed, came up in set silence, stood at Hillyer's door, and called on him for goodness' sake to say what he was doing.

And at that moment, he appeared; confounded by sleep and the shock of his awakening. He stared about him, inarticulate. His fellow-lodgers came up the stairs, came down the stairs, and in their odd costumes gathered and gaped: a group for the last act of a farcical comedy.

"What was that noise?" gasped Hillyer at last. "Is it the gas? Is anybody hurt?"

"It was in your room," said Mr. Pytle, the clerk from downstairs. "I thought the house was coming down on me. Front room," he added, as Hillyer gaped at the bedroom he had just left. Hillyer threw open the door of his sitting-room, and they all trooped in.

"Take care of the glass," shouted the man who had cried out words of Slavonic sound, going with a cautious step towards the gas. They checked, and as the two jets flamed, stared at the ruin about them.

Above the mantelpiece there had stood a vast mirror with a heavily decorated gold frame, in the most ornate manner of the 'sixties. Mrs. Jolly and her friends thought it very handsome, costly, and in these degenerate days, rare. This horrible thing had, somehow, escaped from its cords, and had fallen forward on the table, and had shattered itself into two or three hundred pieces, that now glittered insanely on the floor. Mrs. Jolly lamented the ruin of the mirror, which had come from her Aunt Bessy, of Nuneaton; the rest of the party gaped and jabbered for a while, till one of the young craftsmen climbed from a chair to the white marble mantelpiece, and examined the cord, which had given in two places.

"Perfectly sound, it is," he said, testing what remained unbroken. "Looks as if it had been regular torn apart. Funny."

"Don't try to set things right to-night," said Hillyer, to the afflicted Mrs. Jolly, "and, whatever you do, don't go down on your knees; you'll cut yourself to pieces. Bring up a broom or something in the morning. And you needn't bother about my breakfast; I'll go out and get something."

They all agreed that there was nothing to be done till the next day, and crept back to their beds, yawning. Hillyer thought no more of the matter, save to be somewhat glad that the vulgar and pretentious state of the huge mirror was no more. He made an excellent breakfast at a station hotel the next morning, and came back to find his room in neat order, "Bolton Abbey in the Olden Time" hanging in the place of the monstrous glass, and his landlady mournful but calm. She was slightly uneasy as to the supposed bad luck indicated or caused by a broken mirror; but comforted herself by saying that there were many who didn't believe in that sort of thing now.

A few days later he was tempted into making a morning excursion of a farther range than usual. The wind had changed to the north and had blown away the heavy oppression that had hung over London. The freshness and sweetness of the country floated about the grey walls of Layburn Street, and the sunlight danced and glittered on a poplar that rose, a huge billow of green, from a wilderness of grim yards at the back of the house. Hillyer sallied forth, and with favouring 'buses found himself on Wimbledon Common, in a radiant, rejoicing air. He was strolling slowly along, by a road lined with houses of a rich and prosperous aspect, conjectured rather than seen through groves and shrubberies, when his steps were arrested for a moment by the

sudden noise of smashing glass. He walked on again without curiosity; but a rapid patter of feet, a shout of "Stop!" came behind him, and a rough hand grasped his shoulder and twisted him round. He was in strong keeping. The person of well-to-do appearance who had captured him was thickset and muscular, with features resembling those of the late Professor Huxley: benevolent in repose, no doubt, but at the moment erupting indignation. "Did you do that?" he ejaculated.

"Do what?" said doubting Hillyer.

"Smash my greenhouse. You might have killed me!"

"I say!" exclaimed Hillyer. "Do I look as if I would smash your greenhouse or anybody else's? Besides, I haven't seen a greenhouse this morning; I haven't been off this path for the last ten minutes. What do you mean by talking like this?"

The angry man glared at Hillyer for a moment; then snatched his hands, right and left, and inspected the open palms.

"I beg your pardon. I see I've made a mistake. I apologise. But would you mind coming with me for a moment? I should like to show you what's happened."

Hillyer turned back, and Mr. Horncastle, as he introduced himself, led the way by a postern gate into his demesne. A winding path through deodars, wellingtonias, box, cypress and yew led them to the gravelled space on one side of the large suburban mansion, and Mr. Horncastle pointed eloquently. There was a big greenhouse, as ugly as its tribe or a trifle uglier, and the bulge of its pretentious dome shewed a large and jagged hole. And on the floor inside, with broken flower-pots, scattered mould, and sad blossoms about it, was a huge lump of coal.

Hillyer understood the fierce examination of his hands.

"And where the devil could that have come from?" asked Mr. Horncastle, as the two returned to the open.

Hillyer pointed out that it was too far a cast from the roadway, unless one posited the presence of a Celtic Champion at hurling things through the air; a soured man, of a malicious and mischievous habit of mind. This seemed most unlikely.

"It must have been someone hiding in those laurels, at the edge of your plantation. He popped out, threw the lump of coal, and went back into hiding. He may be there now."

"It's possible. Suppose we have hunt a for him."

"I'm afraid he waited for you to rush out, and made off as soon as he saw us both safe in the greenhouse. But we might try."

They went to and fro amongst the evergreens, and beat about, and peered and poked and pried into the recesses of the close-growing box and cypress. The result was nothing. It seemed quite possible that the offender had indeed watched the outward rush of Mr. Horncastle, his return with Hillyer and the entrance of the two into the greenhouse, and had then taken flight. There was whiskey and soda in the billiard-room after the futile search. Mr Horncastle said he had dismissed an undergardener six months before. It seemed possible that he might have taken his revenge. Mr. Horncastle said he would have a talk to the local detective, apologised once more, and saw Hillyer off the premises. And Hillyer went on his way, entertained on the whole with the small adventure. He had lived so long in obscure retirement that little things diverted him, as the movement of a dull street seems gaiety to the man who has spent years in prison. He found himself speculating as to what manner of rich occupation in the City nurtured Mr. Horncastle, as to the possible guilt of the dismissed under-gardener, as to the result of the conference with the police. Johnson was inclined to wonder at the disuse of smoking at the latter end of the eighteenth century, since, as he pointed out, it was a relief from mere vacuity. But there are many substitutes for tobacco.

The skies were of a calm and even grey, the air was still and a little mournful, as with a prophecy of the autumn to come; and Hillyer made his way back from one of his visits to the Reading Room of the British Museum — now become rarer than in former years — and climbed the steps to the house in Layburn Street. He was in a satisfied and happy mood; for his two or three hours of research had gone prosperously and he had by sheer lucky chance found an unexpected treasure in turning over the pages of the catalogue. His main object in visiting Great Russell Street, once dim and rich in its suggestion, now grown red and rancid, was to investigate the relation between the legends of the Seven Sleepers class and those that tell of mortals who have dwelt for a while with the Queen of the Fairies; to query the identity of the Fairy Queen with Tannhauser's Venus, to determine the exact shade of guilt imputed to personages like Thomas of Ercildoune and the British King in the Mapp story. And then, another point: what was the relation, if any, between these fables and the singular story of the Entertainment of the Venerable Head in the Mabinogion? Did they all symbolise the same experience? Or, were there two experiences, one supernal, and the other, if not infernal, as in Tannhaüser, then at least, dubious, suspect, perilous? All the legends in their essence, no doubt, were pre-Christian: might one take it that those in which the implied experience was held up to reprobation were the stories which had come under the review of the Church; while the Mabinogion mythos (for example) had, for one reason or another, escaped ecclesiastical censure, coming down to us in its original form with its original feeling? Very interesting questions, these, Hillyer thought; and he reviewed them thoughtfully, verified his impressions of the sources, noted down this and that point.

"Query," he wrote, "whether the Church's condemnation, as implied in some of the legends, may not arise from confounding the nature of the sign with the things signified: the Fairy Queen and Venus being taken as sexual symbols, and therefore condemned. Yet this objection should lie equally against the imagery of the Song of Songs. Here the symbolism is undoubtedly and definitely sexual, but the book had not been excluded from the Canon on that account, nor had the nature of the sign been permitted to obscure or tarnish the thing signified. Moderns, of course, have questioned the existence of any symbolism whatever, and are content to hold the book as a passionate love song and nothing more. This position is negligible, as not only opposed to the tradition and doctrine of the whole of Christendom, but to the entire consensus of the East on this matter. The Song of Solomon is written in a symbolical language which would be understood by Easterns of every faith and of all ages.

"All this seems fairly plain and straightforward; but there are perplexed and difficult questions in the background. Putting the Song with its authorised and orthodox interpretation on one side, it is to be enquired whether it be lawful to regain or to attempt to regain the *Earthly* Paradise; to pass, as it were, under the guard of the flaming swords; to recover a state which is represented as definitely ended, so far as bodily existence is concerned. In the Mabinogion story, it may be noted, there is a marked analogy with the Eden story of Genesis. The eating of a certain forbidden fruit in this case, and the opening of a certain forbidden door in that break the enchantment for ever. Adam and Eve know that the gates of Paradise are finally closed against them; the companions of Bendigeid Vran, when the door that looked towards Cornwall and Aber Henvelen was thrown open, saw that all their felicity was accomplished and ended, 'And when they had looked, they were as conscious of all the evils they had ever sustained, and of all the friends and companions they had lost, and of all the misery that had befallen them, as if all had happened in that very spot.' The 'Entertaining of the Noble Head' was finished.

"There was no hope or possibility of renewing it: never would they hear again the three fairy birds of Rhiannon 'singing unto them a certain song'

"Of course it may he said that the Fairy Queen tales are to be taken in the same sense, and as referring to the same mysterious loss as the Genesis story and the Welsh story; they may all be understood to refer to the *Parens Protoplastus*, to Adam, the archetypal or Platonic man, not to any actual man; though in this or that legend an individual and actual man, such as Thomas of Ercildoune, is made to achieve the adventure of fairyland. This is a point worth noting: it may or may not be valid."

He had made his notes and practically finished the work of the afternoon, when, as he glanced through one of the volumes of the catalogue, he came upon a title which, somehow, attracted him. The author was the

Reverend Thomas Hampole, and the book was called *A London Walk*: *Meditations in the streets of the Metropolis.* It bore the date 1853. Hillyer could scarcely say what it was that drew him in this sententious title, with its hint of moralising: perhaps his own recent walks abroad made him desire to compare his experiences with those of a fellow-traveller of long ago. At all events, he made out his form, and got the book, a thinnish octavo, bound in faded brown cloth stamped with blind tools of weak invention. There was a frontispiece entitled, "The Old Wells, Canonbury", a steel engraving by J. Rospickx, after the well-known painting by R. Landon: not a great performance, and yet hinting that curious sense of enchantment that is often lacking in the cleverer work of to-day. In the distance, a glimpse of a classic facade; umbrageous trees drooped over smooth lawns in the middle distance; and in the foreground fashionable ladies and gentlemen, dressed in the habit of the Regency, gathered about a glassy waterpool, admiring a marble nymph who rose from its depths. Glancing at this odd performance, Hillyer turned to the book, found himself addressed as "Courteous Reader", but persevered.

"Has it ever been your fortune, courteous reader," the author enquired, "to rise in the earliest dawning of a summer day, ere yet the radiant beams of the sun have done more than touch with light the domes and spires of the great city? Have you risen from your couch, weary, perchance, of sleepless hours of tossing to and fro, or, it may be, impelled by the call of business, and gone forth through the familiar street where your abode is situated, the street which had known your steps by day and by night, but never before at the hour of dawn? If this has been your lot, have you not observed that magic powers have apparently been at work? The accustomed scene has lost its familiar appearance. The houses which you have passed daily, it may be for many years, as you have issued forth on your avocations or your amusements, now seem as if you beheld them for the first time. They have suffered a mysterious change, into something rich and strange. Though they may have been designed by no extraordinary exertion of the art of architecture, though their materials may be of common brick and stone and piaster, though neither Pentelicus nor Ferrara has assisted in the adornment of these edifices; yet you have been ready to affirm that they now 'Stand in glory, shine like stars, apparelled in a light serene They have become magical habitations, supernal dwellings; more desirable to the eye than the fabled pleasure dome of the Eastern potentate, or the bejewelled hall built by the Genie for Aladdin in the Arabian Tale."

And so forth, and so forth:

"And if the boughs of a tree chance to extend over a garden wall, you are ready to vow that its roots must flourish in the soil of Paradise."

"Your perspective may be closed by the heights of Hampstead or of Highgate; but in the light of the Aurora these hills rise in the land that is very far off,"

A good deal in this vein; and then a curious passage:

"But all these are transitory effects that soon disappear. As the sun mounts in the sky, the vision fades *into the light of common day*; buildings, trees, objects close at hand and distant vistas resume their ordinary aspect; the whole enchanting scene is now *a sullen street of common clay.* You may, perhaps, reproach yourself with having allowed your senses to be beguiled and your imagination to be overcome by the mere fact that you have gazed on a familiar scene in unusual circumstances. Yet, some have declared that it lies within our own choice to gaze continually upon a world of like beauty, or even greater. It is said by these that all the experiments of the alchemists of the Dark Ages, generally supposed to be 'dreams at the dawn of philosophy', the feeble gropings of an ignorant and superstitious time after the truths of philosophical knowledge, are, in fact, related not to the transmutation of metals, but to the transmutation of the entire Universe. The avowed aim of these *alchemical philosophers* was not always regarded with favour by those high in Church and state; but it is said, I do not know whether on good or bad authority, that their concealed principles and projects would have caused them to incur still greater odium, and indeed, have made them liable to persecution of the most rigorous kind. This seems probable enough, when we are reminded by the history of the famous Friar Bacon that those in authority during the period of the Middle Ages had but little tolerance for unlicensed or unusual theories and experiments."

Hillyer skipped over a few pages. He felt that this discovery of his, this oddest of odd books, deserved a day's clear study; it was not to be taken as a mere epilogue to the afternoon's work. But before he returned the brown volume to the desk, his eye was arrested by a passage printed in italics:

"*This method, or art, or science, or whatever we choose to call it (supposing that it really exists) is simply concerned to restore the delights of the primal Paradise; to enable men, if they will, to inhabit a world of joy and of splendour. I have no authority either to affirm or to deny that there is such an experiment, and that some have made it. I therefore abandon the matter to the consideration and the enquiry of men of equal and ingenious mind."*

Hillyer felt, as he shut the door of his room, that his afternoon had been exceptionally fruitful. He resolved to make a careful study of A *London Walk;* and to find out all that he could as to the author, this obscure Thomas Hampole, who dated his brief preface, Hillyer had observed, from Clifford's Inn. The apparatus of his tea, with the spirit-lamp, was set ready for him on the table, and this done, and the dusky tobacco well lighted, he settled down for the evening to enter up the notes he had made at the Reading Room, materials for the curious book that might be written — some day.

And while he was in the midst of these calm pursuits, all hell broke loose above him. With a terrific crash some heavy piece of furniture

thundered to the floor, and a shower of plaster covered Hillyer, his table, and the carpet with white dust. One would have said that, in the room above, Badminton, fait Badminton, was being played with chairs for shuttlecocks; and a minor game was going on with the vases on the mantelpiece. Hillyer ran from his room and summoned the landlady from her depths.

"God help us!" she cried. "Mr. Zerny must have gone mad, and who's to pay?"

Indeed, the noise came from Mr. Zerny's room — he put a good many more letters into his name, but his English friends did not trouble about them — as was speedily evident, when Mrs. Jolly and Hillyer entered without ceremony. For the room was wreck and disaster. A great wardrobe cupboard had fallen on the floor. The two chairs were smashed out of shape. The china was in fragments. It was all a horrible spectacle of ruin. And when Mr. Zerny saw it he screamed. But the mischief was clearly not due to any madness of his, since he had been working overtime, and did not get home from his shop till an hour later. His neighbour, Haddock, was out of town, having been sent away on some job in the country. Doubt, anger and distraction fell upon the whole house. And that question that Mrs. Jolly had asked herself and the world, "Who's to pay?" bore upon her more heavily than the riddle of the Sphinx. "On the top of my beautiful glass smashed to bits the other night in Mr. Hillyer's room," as she said to her friends and neighbours, "What is one to make of it? Indeed, you may ask, and echo answers you, as they say: what is anybody to make of it? And who's to pay? Five pounds wouldn't buy me another glass like the one I've had broken to bits, and there's the chairs only good for firewood, and all that china just fit for the dustman to take away in his cart."

"But how did it happen? And who done it? That's what I should want to know if I was in your place, Mrs. Jolly. I should indeed."

"That's what I said to my husband last night," broke in another lady. "I said to him: 'Albert,'

I said, 'there's something behind all this,' I said, 'that we don't know of. First of all,' I said, 'there's that beautiful glass that was over the mantelpiece in the front-room of Mrs. Jolly's first floor. You don't tell me,' I said, 'that that lovely mirror was broke natural. Mrs. Jolly gave me them cords to hold in me hand,' as you did, Mrs. Jolly, 'and anybody could see,' I said, 'that it wasn't no accident. Them cords was strong, like new, and they must have been torn and done on purpose, and it was a strong hand and arm that done it. And what I say is,' I said, ' 'oo done it? That's what I should want to know,' I said to my husband. And now that top room; as if wild men had been fighting in it!"

And a third counsellor:

"I can't say as to that glass. I never saw it, and I never saw the cord that held it. Funny things do happen with cord; we know that. But chairs don't throw themselves about. That's certain. Then, who threw them? It's what I call a mystery. This is a mystery, I said to myself last night when I heard about it, if ever there was one. We know somebody upset that wardrobe, and threw those two chairs about and broke that china. Who was it? Was it somebody in the house or did they come in from the street? It must have been one or the other, it seems to me."

Mrs. Jolly explained the position:

"It was just on seven o'clock when it all happened," she began. "Mr. Pytle had been back for half an hour, or it might be a little over. I was frying a chop for his supper, and it was all ready and waiting in the oven, and Annie here" — indicating her daughter— "had just run round to the Quill in New Street for a pint of mild and bitter for Mr. Pytle's supper, and I was waiting by the window to see her come back, and dish up and take up his tray for him. And the minute I see her come down the Steps, I put the plate on the tray and Annie come in with the jug, and then there came that awful bang and crash, and Mr. Hillyer calling out. I thought I should have dropped. So I don't see how anybody could have got into the house, with me watching up to the last minute.". "Not that minute," said one of the ladies, "no, certainly not. But they might have been hid somewhere for hours for all you know or we know either. In the very room, it might be, for all we can tell. I suppose you hadn't been in the room since the morning when you done the bed."

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Jolly, who found this possibility of hidden foes lurking concealed in her house a terrifying supposition. "To think of that! You're quite right, Mrs. Dolman. I get all my rooms nice and tidy as soon as ever I can, and I hadn't occasion to go up on that floor, let alone Mr. Zerny's room since ten in the morning."

"There, you see. Anybody might have been there. You can't be watching the street door all day long, and there's plenty of people that locks don't puzzle."

"But suppose they was in, how'd they get out?"

"Easy enough. Them as can get in and hide can hide and get out. I don't suppose, Mrs. Jolly, you troubled to look into the other room on your top floor."

"I never thought of it," gasped Mrs. Jolly. "Dear, oh dear!"

"That was the way, then. Waited till it was dark and all quiet, and you in your beds, and then slipped out as easy as easy."

It was felt that Mrs. Dolman had solved the enigma. But Mrs. Jolly propounded a new problem.

"But what on earth did they do such a wicked thing for? I haven't got an enemy in the world so far as I can say. And nothing taken. I can't see the sense of it."

They all confessed that they could make nothing of it. The police were consulted. They came, examined the house, questioned the lodgers, enquired as to the possibility of dismissed servants of a spiteful nature; and, like Mrs. Jolly and her friends, made nothing of it.

The Inspector, or Superintendent, or whatever he was, certainly had a suggestion, but it did not seem to lead anybody very far.

"I seem to remember," he said to Mrs. Jolly, "something of the same kind over Hornsey way, nine or ten years ago. It didn't come under our official notice at all, there being no suggestion of anything criminal. In consequence, we haven't any sort of record available for purposes of comparison. But it was all written up a good deal in the papers, especially the evening papers; columns of it there were. As far as I can remember, having read these newspaper articles as a member of the public, this Hornsey business was an affair of breakages: two or three pounds' worth of damage done, I believe. Things thrown about, you know. The family would be sitting round their fire comfortable of an evening, and there'd be a smash of glass and a lump of coal falling in the middle of the room. China and glass ornaments, too; they'd be flung from one side of the room to the other, in a very surprising manner, from what the papers said about it. There was a clergyman, a friend of the family, I believe, told one of the newspaper reporters that he'd seen a metal ash-tray fly off the mantelpiece and fall at his feet, right across the room. Very surprising, no doubt. I don't profess to have fathomed it out at all myself; speaking solely from what I read about it, it was my impression that there was some jiggery-pokery or other in the background, as I expect there is in your business, Mrs. Jolly.

"But one thing comes back to my mind; it struck me at the time as very singular. I must say, I couldn't make anything of it. There were some young people in the family, a couple of boys, thirteen to fifteen years old, I think they were. Well, it was announced three or four weeks after the disturbances had terminated, or it might be more, that one of these boys had become subject to epileptic fits. I must say, I don't see myself that fits are here or there, supposing these people and their friend the minister spoke the truth; but there it is.

Now, Mrs. Jolly, I gather that your daughter's the only inhabitant of your house who might be termed young. That is so, I believe."

Mrs. Jolly grew red in the face before the policeman's interrogative eye.

"Not at all," she said briskly. "Mr. Zerny and Mr. Haddock are quite

young."

"Now what age would you say they are? As far as you can judge, you know."

"Well, Mr. Zerny may be twenty-five, and Mr. Haddock a couple of years older — just about that, I should say, more or less."

"Ah, yes, Mrs. Jolly, but that isn't quite what I had in my mind when I was talking of young persons. Twenty-five, you may say, is grown up and a little bit over. No, I was thinking of something younger than that, more about in the 'teens, as they say. Now what age is your daughter that we were speaking of — if one may ask a young lady's age?"

Mrs. Jolly, as she said afterwards, looked very straight at the officer. She would have liked — she fervently desired — to tell him to mind his own business. But she held that it was no good to set their backs up; so she answered coldly:

"Annie is nineteen; nineteen next December, that is."

"Exactly, exactly. Now we're coming to cues, as a theatrical gentleman I knew once was in the habit of saying. That's much more like it. And — you'll excuse me, I'm sure — but has she ever had any trouble of the sort we were speaking of? You take my meaning?"

Mrs. Jolly was appalled. She was not a reader of detective fiction; but she had heard the almost miraculous powers of detectives discussed. She had not believed in these tales. "All make-up and a lot of nonsense, if you ask me," had expressed her attitude. Now she believed and trembled. Who would have thought it? Her goods and chattels had been maliciously damaged and destroyed; she had called in the police, and by tortuous and mysterious ways they had brought it round to Annie's fits. She had not the courage to deny.

"Not real fits," she distinguished. "And all over years ago. She fell down the kitchen stairs when she was thirteen and hurt her head. But the doctor said she would get over them. And she did. She's had no trouble at all since she was fifteen."

"Quite so, quite so," said the officer. "I quite understand. Well, I'm afraid we can't do anything further, Mrs. Jolly. Good morning."

He went off with the air of a man who has solved a dark and obscure mystery by the exertion of faculties verging on the superhuman. And he left Mrs. Jolly a firm and awed believer in the miracle of the detective art. It was two or three hours before she was able to judge the situation with her usual sagacious commonsense. Indeed, it was with a shock that she at last realised that, in hard fact, the detective had really detected nothing. It was absolutely certain that Annie had nothing whatever to do either with the shattering of the picture or with the wrecking of Mr. Zerny's room. In the one case the girl had

been asleep in bed beside her mother; in the other she had been standing by the kitchen table, with the beer-jug in her hand. Annie's alibis were undoubted, firm, above all question. "So that's that," said Mrs. Jolly to herself, in the deplorable idiom which she had, somehow, acquired.

And yet it hurt her a little to have to return to the flat sanity of her former attitude on the mystery and craft of detection.

"After all," she observed, to an old friend, consoling herself, "I will say it was a marvel the way he found out about my poor girl's illness. I don't know how he done it. Wonderful. Why, nobody's past life isn't safe from them, Mrs. Hemmons."

CHAPTER III

1

I HAVE OFTEN SPECULATED, HILLYER WROTE, IN one of his notebooks, as to the state of the human consciousness immediately after death. I am inclined to believe that the most salient feature of that extraordinary mode of existence, in its opening period, at all events, is confusion. Once or twice, I have found myself in a familiar room in total darkness; by the accident of having forgotten to take matches in my pocket, or by the accident of having omitted to place the box of matches in its usual position on shelf or table. It is extraordinary how easily and quickly all sense of direction and position are lost. Perhaps there may have been an initial mistake, in the nervous flurry of looking for those matches and not finding them. Dazzled with the darkness, if such a phrase may be allowed, I have gone to the right, intending the left, and after the first false step the confusion becomes more and more hopeless. The hands are stretched out to touch the expected object, and find nothingness; the feet stumble on obstacles which are not supposed to exist. Distances are misjudged, all reckonings are falsified; the armchair where I have sat day after day has become a terrifying enigma. I resolve to get out of this room that is confounding me, and I cannot find the door. I suffer from a kind of false panic; I am only sustained by the firm conviction that, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, I am in my own familiar room, though it seems through the well-used door that I have passed into a black unknown chaos. Yet, I know that this is a false report, and that I shall come out into the light at last. There may be something like this at the moment — but there are no longer moments — that succeeds death.

Or, it is possible that a better image is to be found in the dream state, and its interaction on the consciousness of the waking hours? There is a wonderful passage in De Quincey, describing the strange way in which some figure in his dreams would occasionally survive, as it were, the awakening. I think the particular instance he gives is of a dream of a dance. Cavaliers and their ladies tread an ancient, splendid measure: the dreamer awakes suddenly, and sees, dimly, the familiar forms of his own room. But there, standing on the floor at the bottom of his bed, is a beautiful woman, one of the figures of the dream, seen clearly for an instant in the light of dreamland. I have myself experienced something of this kind: the presence of the two worlds; the dark dome of the enchanted mountain and the dark mass of the dressing-table both seen at once. A man once told me a very curious experience of his, which

illustrates this most singular confusion, or interaction, of the two states. He dreamed that he was in bed, fast asleep — as he was. He then dreamed that he woke up and remembered that the night before he had been engaged with certain papers of extraordinary and secret importance; and that he had been so careless as to leave them exposed on his desk. There was no truth, or semblance of truth in this; he had no papers of any consequence in his possession, and no secrets worth twopence. And then, this dreamer thought of another matter of anxiety. There were those papers teeming with their deadly secrets, lying open in the next room, and at half-past eight his brother-in-law would be coming round to breakfast: he of all men must never see those tremendous documents. They must be concealed before he came. And here truth again peeped in. He had a brother-in-law, who was expected to look in for breakfast. The man, deep asleep all the while, opened his eyes. It was quite dark and therefore early. Jack (the brother-in-law) would not be coming yet awhile. Still, he felt that he must make sure of the time, so he got up, and went to the chair where his coat was hanging; the matches were in one of the pockets. He felt in the pocket; it was empty. Then he remembered that the night before, out of his usual custom, he had left the box of matches on the dressing-table. He crossed the room, found the matches on the table, returned, and struck a match, and looked at the clock by his bedside. Five o'clock; more than three hours before Jack would be likely to turn up. He would hear the daily servant coming at a little before eight. There would be plenty of time to hide the papers then; in the meantime, he would get back to bed and sleep. But all these manœuvres of his, the shufflings and stumblings about the room, and then the hiss and flare of the match, had woke up my friend's wife. She asked him, with some irritation, what on earth he was doing. He tried to explain the situation; the nature of the secrets, the importance, the dire importance of keeping them from Jack. She, half awake, and only dimly perceiving that nonsense was being talked, said tartly: "Oh, do get back to bed and go to sleep!" This impudent and careless contempt — so he took it — for matters of great moment filled my friend's heart with rage. He was furious; it was with difficulty that he restrained himself from uttering the bitterest reproaches. He went back to bed in savage silence, and, as he told me, it was only as he laid his head on the pillow that he woke up and realised that he had been thinking, ailing, and talking nonsense of the wildest kind.

Here is an instance, then, of the two states, the waking state and the dream state, impinging on one another, mingling sheer fantasy and delusion with the plain facts of life. In some particulars, the memory was both sane and active: Jack, the brother-in-law, existed, and he was coming to breakfast. Moreover, he was actually a most inquisitive man; it might almost be said that, in his business, curiosity was a virtue. Further, there was the co-operation of the memory and the senses in the finding of the matchbox, after the initial forgetfulness, and in the inspection of the clock; and yet the whole operation was based on a vain figment. The man was asleep and dreaming; and yet he

was awake; the one world was inextricably mingled with the other. It is, perhaps, in some such confusion that the newly dead may move. But what we should call their past life is, doubtless, the wild dream that troubles them. They cannot rouse themselves from the delusion that the weight of intolerable sorrows is pressing on their hearts; and then again, they are vexed at the first dawning of the thought — one must use mortal words — that those old ecstatic joys were also delusions and figments without significance.

But all this apart — and more than enough of a world for which we have no words; since, like music, it is beyond words, beyond ideas — there is another sense in which the dream world mingles with the world of actuality. There is a common phrase, which, perhaps, means more than it is intended to mean. "You must have dreamt it!" people say when they hear something that astonishes them a good deal. On the face of it, the phrase implies, "That's not true"; really, it simply means, "you surprise me very much." But, perhaps, in rare cases, the teller of the tale had dreamt "it", and had allowed it to trickle into his consciousness as a piece of actual experience or veritable knowledge. And, on the other hand, these may be impressions about which a man is uncertain; wondering whether this or that were an actual experience, a thing seen or heard, or read; or whether it did not come out of some dream of the night. Something of this kind happened to me, very much to my alarm at the time. I found myself repeating, internally, a string of senseless jargon, and beating about in my endeavour to find some rational source or origin for the gibberish I was repeating, trying vainly to connect it with actual experience... with something read... with a dream; inclining, on the whole, to the belief that it was a broken recollection of a dream, perhaps of many years ago. For dreams certainly remain in the memory under the same conditions and according to the same laws as those governing our waking impressions.

I remember, vividly, every detail of a horrid nightmare that beset me when I cannot have been more than five years old. I can recall the awful oppression of formless terror with which I awoke with much greater distinctness than many actual events of far later years. Many of these, indeed, I have, as we say, forgotten — though, of course, nothing is really forgotten — but the horror that befell by that bend of the road close to my old home is as clear in my mind as the image of the houses opposite, or clearer; though I glanced at them ten minutes ago, and the nightmare must be nearly fifty years away. And there is another question which may open strange vistas of thought: whether it is only the dreams recollected on awakening that remain in our memories. These are but a few out of a great number. Some day, perhaps in the hour of death, the rest may return, and appear before us, a wild multitude.

But the experience which alarmed me, to which I have referred, was, I think, a morbid symptom. I had shut myself up with my books and my investigations for too long a time, and my nervous system must have been

near the breaking point. The specialist whom I consulted advised me to go away to a new scene and fresher air, to be idle, to distract myself from my work, and to take things more lightly and easily for the future. I did as I was told, and found myself better; as well, indeed, as I hope to be for the rest of my day. And this, in spite of a very strange and unpleasant experience which happened towards the end of my stay at Porth, in South Wales. It was an experience which annoyed and puzzled me very much at the time. Now and again, I have been tempted to set it down as a grotesque and extremely ill-natured practical joke; but some of the circumstances were hardly patient of this explanation, and I am still bewildered whenever I think of the affair. However, I did not allow it to affect my health or my mental composure, either at the time or afterwards. My nervous trouble, or whatever it was, fell upon me in May. I spent most of June at the seaside, and came back feeling perfectly fit and well, as I have said. I am quite sure that my nerves were as sound as they ever had been. I was keeping in mind all the time the advice the doctor had given me. I no longer "shut myself up in a cupboard" with my books all day long and most of the night — I am using the specialist's phrases. I read the papers and went out and about every morning; and so gave mind and body the air; it was only in the afternoon and evening that I devoted myself to the fairy gold. In the course of these researches, now carried on with a little more sense than before, pure luck led me to a most interesting discovery. This was an odd little book, called A *London Walk*, published by some obscure firm nearly eighty years ago, and, so far as I can make out, utterly neglected and unknown. It was written by a clergyman, the Rev. Thomas Hampole, and is the author's only title in the British Museum Catalogue. The Rev. Thomas was sententious and occasionally pompous — after the manner of his tribe, as some might say — but his book had some extremely curious things in it which interested me immensely; they were things that, so far as I could see, were quite in the line of my studies and quests. Or, on parallel lines, perhaps: rather in the vein of: "There is a great experiment, and some there are that have made it": which is not quite what I am after, but something like it. The end may be the same in both cases; but I am not sure about that. Anyhow, there were some very striking things in this Hampole book; and I was inquisitive. I wanted, naturally, to know something about the man himself, where he came from, how he lived, what he had done besides writing *A London Walk*; but I was a good deal more interested to know where his book came from, what its literary sources were. The author did not strike me as having the creative, originating mind: he was rather of the "from information received" type, and I wanted to know where he had got his information. There were traces of the influence of Blake; but, one would have said, much stronger traces of Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations.* There was the difficulty. *A London Walk* was published in the early 'fifties, and the manuscript of the *Centuries* was not discovered till at least fifty years later. Of course, it was quite possible that this manuscript, which came to light at last

on a bookstall in Farringdon Street, had not remained uninspected and unread since 1674 or thereabouts, when it was written. It was possible, if it came to that, that it had been in the possession of Hampole himself. Well, there were a good many odd questions connected with the book; and I have no doubt that they occupied my mind pretty constantly. I daresay that I had Hampole in my mind as I was sitting one night in my room, somewhere between nine and ten. It was one of the hot and heavy nights of the London summer, when any wind there may be falls with the sun, and the heat seems to swelter from the pavements and the walls. I had the window wide open, and I was sitting at my desk with a shaded candle lamp beside me; I always use one for working, and find it very much better than gas or electric light. There was a tap at the door, and thinking it was my landlady with some question of bacon and eggs, I said: "Come in," and turned round on my chair. I was a good deal surprised to see an old friend, Montonnier Hawkins, especially as he was a bibliographer of experience, and exactly the man I wanted to see. I welcomed him, put out my candle, turned on the gas, sat him down, and asked how he got in. "I didn't hear your knock."

"The door was open. About the time of going for the supper beer? So I walked up." We talked a little of old times, of good event and ill event that had fallen to men we had known, twenty, thirty years ago; of some that had died, and of others that were sorry, perhaps, to be surviving. And then I came to the matter that was so much in my mind just then. I found Hawkins knew about Hampole — what there was to be known, and that not much.

He came, it seemed, of an old yeoman family who had been long settled in a village near Northampton. His parents were well-to-do people, and they sent him to Oxford, where he took his degree in 1830. He was ordained deacon and priest by the Bishop of Lichfield, was curate at Alfreton in Derbyshire, then in Stafford, and finally at Altrincham, near Manchester. About 1840, he received a legacy from an uncle, enough apparently to make him independent of his profession, since shortly afterwards he took chambers at Clifford's Inn, and only did occasional duty for the rest of his life. He died in 1871. Nothing much more was known of him. He was supposed to have corresponded with the author of *A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery*, but, according to Hawkins, none of his letters had been preserved.

It was not much. With the one exception of the reputed association between Hampole, and the author of a very singular book, it threw little light on his literary origins. Hawkins, I found, knew nothing about the subject matter of *A London Walk*; and indeed, his interests were purely bibliographical. It was a rare book, he said, but not generally "collected": it would be worth four or five pounds, not more. Many copies had been ruined by the work of Grangerisers, or extra-illustrators, who had torn out the frontispiece.

I had been bending over the table, taking notes of such dates and facts

as Hawkins gave me. At the end of his remarks, I looked up from the paper, and met his eye. I was struck at once by something strange and unfamiliar in his expression. There was a look of fury in his face that terrified me. He did not utter a word. There was dead silence in the room. I thought he had suddenly gone mad, and I would have given anything to start to my feet, and shout and rush at him; but a ghastly oppression weighed on me and held me fast, and held my lips. It was as if I had been gagged and bound; and as if a heavy weight had been laid on my breast. I suffered an unutterable horror. The figure opposite to me seemed to change into a dreadful and unspeakable and most detestable shape, and then everything was black darkness.

I came to myself trembling with fear. I did not dare to move for some time. Then I heard a clock strike eleven. I looked about the room fearfully; saw there was nothing amiss, and ventured at last to my feet, and crawled to the cupboard, and poured out and drank off half a glass of whiskey. I felt myself slowly returning from a world of very awful experience: the fiery mist out of which I seemed to have come melted slowly away. For a long time I was afraid to go to bed. I drank more whiskey, deliberately, not to raise my spirits, but to stupefy myself into sleep that I hoped would be dreamless. It was three o'clock in the morning when at last I went heavily to bed.

It was some days before I could shake off the terrible sense of fear. As soon as I began to think the matter over with some approach to calmness, I made up my mind that I had fallen asleep in my chair, and had been visited by violent nightmare; the weight and oppression I had experienced seemed to me decisive. And, indeed, these symptoms apart, there was no other explanation to be given. I wanted badly to write to Hawkins, shaping my letter in such a way that if, indeed, he had been to see me that night, the fact would appear in his reply, I was ashamed to do so. About a fortnight later, I ran across him in the Reading Room and managed to get out a question as to Hampole and *A London Walk.* He said he had just heard of the book as a minor rarity, that he believed that it was sought for to some extent in occult circles. Then I asked him about the author, and, to my glowing relief, Hawkins declared that he knew nothing about him. I felt that I had been a fool to want his assurance; but so it was. And the experience passed into the region of dreams.

And in spite of that, it still persisted vividly, with all the force and the impression of an actual experience. It would stay with me as though it had happened; and it stays with me still: a dream, and yet an event. I have to be on my guard against it; against the recognition of it as something that is, veritably, part of my life. And, no doubt, it is the panic terror, the deadly oppression of fear with which the dream ended that fortifies me against taking it as actuality. Here are the marks of nightmare, not to be mistaken. The first part of the dream; the tap on the door, Hawkins entering and explaining probably enough, that the street door had been left open for the return of somebody with a beer-jug — I have heard my landlady say that she always

locks the area gate when it gets dark — all this was perfectly in the common order of things. And so were his replies to my questions; his account of Thomas Hampole's very ordinary and uninteresting career, his bibliographer's summing up of the rarity and comparatively small value of the book; his remark as to the imperfect state of many copies, owing to the tearing out of the frontispiece; again, everything is strictly according to common order. I must say that if it had all stopped there, or, rather, if Hawkins had stayed a little longer and chatted odds and ends before leaving, I should most certainly have believed that he had paid me an actual visit. I should have woke up, looked about me with the dazed bewilderment of the awaking sleeper, and concluded that I had fallen asleep in my chair after seeing Hawkins out at the street door. No doubt, as I say, there would be a sense of bewilderment, of questioning uncertainty; the 'Have I been dreaming, or what?' mood. The edges would have been a little misty and undecided; there would have been a certain vagueness, let us say, about the beginning and end of the dream. But, I make no doubt that if it had all kept within the lines I have mentioned, the whole thing would have passed into my mind as an ordinary bit of experience. I should have accepted Hawkins's somewhat bald data as entirely trustworthy, and probably have regarded them as a starting point for more searching enquiries. It was the fright in which I awoke, the instant recollection of the abominable transformation that I had witnessed, which convicted the whole of being a mere figment of the sleeping brain, stirred, no doubt, into this most disagreeable form of activity by something wrong with the digestion. No one can suspect true nightmare of being a part of actuality: its own evidence is destructive of any such claim. If Westminster Abbey turns into a cloud that descends upon you and chokes your breath and suffocates you, you know when you wake, panting and trembling, that it was all a dream and that you are safe. *Credo quia impossibile*: using the old phrase with a new twist.

And yet: that test may lead us to strange conclusions. "The impossible, the contradiction in terms must be a dream"; where shall we find ourselves if we allow that axiom to mark the distinction between dream and waking? To leave on one side our attempted definitions of time and space, which involve us in bottomless pits of absurdity and contradiction: think of the mark on the paper which we are told is a line; that which is length without breadth and therefore invisible for ever to the eye of flesh. Think also of Achilles in his vain chase of the tortoise; and see into what hideous nonsense the certainty of mathematics leads us. If the belief in monstrous absurdity and contradiction be the sure mark of dreaming, then what do we do daily? What world is it that we inhabit?

Let me note this. It is possible that those who find their way to the Queen of Fairyland are liberated from these dreams and monsters and delusions, and behold with a rapture of delight the real world. But it is agreed on all hands that such are forced to return, and the fairy gold is dust and ashes

in the morning.

But all this is beside the mark; beside the present mark at all events. I said that it was the extravagant and monstrous ending that convinced me that Hawkins's visit was nothing but a dream: all that went before was rational and orderly enough, and dull enough, too, to be part of any day. But there was one singular circumstance which so far I have not noted. Before I went to bed on that evil night, I gathered up the loose papers that were about the room, and locked them in my desk. I have always had the good habit of leaving my sitting-room tidy at night. Loose papers are apt to go astray; and they are in the way of the landlady's daughter, when she comes to lay the table in the morning. When this particular morning came, and I had done my best with the breakfast before me, I felt that I needed a very liberal dose of fresh air. Indeed, I thought the case almost pointed to Brighton and back, but this seemed an extreme measure, so I went on 'bus outside to Wimbledon. I had found that the air blew freshly on the Common, and I meant to combine its benefits with an enquiry into an odd business which had happened when I was last there, a few weeks earlier. One of the prosperous people who live in the big houses on the Common had run out of his garden as I was passing by, and had accused me of smashing his greenhouse by throwing a lump of coal at it. I soon convinced him that I had nothing to do with the outrage, and that nobody could have hit the greenhouse from the road. Mr. Horncastle — or something northern of that kind — made up his mind that the criminal must be a gardener whom he had discharged some time before; and I thought I should like to hear what had happened. But it turned out that the gardener had been at Plymouth on that particular day, by clear evidence; and there was nothing more to be done. But at all events, I had my dose of fresh breezes, and I came back feeling all the better for the excursion. After tea, I went to my desk and began to set my papers in order — and was on the verge of a relapse. There, on one of the sheets of paper, were the notes concerning Thomas Hampole that I dreamed I had taken. "I dreamed I had taken!" But I had taken them. There they were; very plainly written by me:

"*Thomas Hampole b. The Lees*, *Hedgworth, nr. Northampton, c.* 1809. *Queen's Coll. Oxon. A.D.* 1830. *Ordained*, *Bp of Lichfield. D.* 32.

P. 33. *Curate Alfreton, Derb.* 32-35: *Stafford* 36-38: *Altrincham, nr. Manchester,* 38-40. *Settled Clifford's Inn,* 1842. *Ob.* 1871."

Then it all happened. That was my first thought, and I was sick with fear. Then it had all happened. And that abomination had been accomplished here before my eyes. For a moment, it was a relief to me to remember what the doctor had said to me a few weeks before: "If you don't take care you will be seeing things." It was a relief, that is, to think that I was going mad.

It was some time before I was able to calm myself and consider the whole business with sense, instead of panic. I remembered the affair of that friend of mine; his dream of the secret papers not to be seen by his brother-in-law; how, fast asleep all the while, he had hunted his matchbox from pocket to table, struck a light, inspected the clock, gone back to bed, not awaking till his head had touched the pillow. I found a great similarity between the two cases. If he could look at a clock and tell the time in his sleep, I might just as easily take pencil and paper, and put down the inventions of my dream. This was, no doubt, exactly what had happened, and — save for the senseless horror of the dream, which will haunt me, I suppose, as that nightmare of my childhood has haunted me — there the matter rests. I confess that I have made no further researches into the life of Thomas Hampole, or into the literary origins, if any, of *A London Walk.* I do not like to think how I might feel, if such research confirmed all the facts which I jotted down in my dream. I suppose I should have to fall back on the hypothesis that I had read it all, perhaps without attention, many years before, that it had sunk below the level of my conscious mind, and that it had risen from the depths of the subconscious during the dream. Such things do happen; I have found myself in a dream pattering Greek phrases far beyond my waking capacity. I have remembered these phrases on waking, and verified them with the aid of Liddell and Scott, finding to my astonishment that I was more learned by night than by day. I should be prepared, then, if I happened to discover that the bibliographer of the dream had been strictly accurate; and there I intend to let the matter rest. And as for Hampole's book and its connexions, that is to rest too. I have a superstitious doubt whether the chance that led me to it were altogether a happy one.

2

It seems probable that Hillyer made these personal notes and wrote down the accompanying reasonings and meditations by way of relief. He had very few friends, and nearly all of them, if not all, were less friends than acquaintances. He had lived alone for many years. He had lost the habit of ready speech; if he had ever possessed it. When he did talk, it was of external things, never of his own feelings or inner experiences. Still, it is to be supposed that he felt the need of expression; and so, apparently, he made a quarto manuscript book serve the office of an intimate friend. More men are in this case, perhaps, than is generally supposed. Pepys was familiar enough, in a sense, with plenty of jolly gossips, and *bona robas,* and men of State; but he held his real converse with himself in the shorthand cypher: Pepys was the only confidant of Pepys. Hillyer, whose mere acquaintances were few enough, had all the greater need of shewing his heart to himself. He wound up the odd affair of Hampole to his own satisfaction, but before long he was at work

again.

Life has some strange satisfactions, alleviations, and escapes from trouble — the new page begins. I remember long ago, soon after I first came to London and before I had taken the final vows of solitude, or something very near solitude, being confronted by a queer experience in its trivial way. Some people I knew who lived at Highgate used to encourage their friends to drop in for coffee, whiskey, tobacco and talk on Sunday nights. I don't think they went so far as to say they were At Home. One cold winter night, with a wind roaring about the housetop and whining in the chimney, we all drew our chairs in a rough semi-circle about the fire. We had been sitting in this way for half an hour or more when there was a slight but intense sort of noise. I do not know whether to call it a puff, or a hiss, or a whiz; perhaps it was a combination of all three. With the noise, some object shot off the mantelpiece, and fell with a flop on the ground before us, in the centre of the semi-circle. One of the party picked up the object, and it turned out to be a matchbox. In it, there were four or five matches. They had been used; the wood was blackened; but they were quite cold. No doubt somebody out of range of the fireplace and the nearest ash-tray had used the matchbox in their stead, and had finally put it down on the mantelshelf. The man who picked up the box and examined it, flung it into the fire with an expression of faint contempt, as if he disapproved of the transaction. We speculated vaguely for a few minutes as to what had happened and how it had happened, and then dropped the subject. Some of the party, encountering one another a few days afterwards, did a little more wondering and suggesting of possible explanations; but nobody was much interested, because everybody knew there was some trick, and, it seemed, a clever one, since it remained undiscovered. But nobody was really curious, or puzzled, or perturbed; since nobody believed that the matchbox had been shot through the air by occult forces, hidden from man. Miracles are not on the modern map; and our disbelief in them is one of the escapes from trouble to which I have alluded. We see something that we do not understand; and we conclude that there is a trick somewhere. And usually, unless we are seriously affected by the event, we trouble no farther, not even to find out what the trick may have been.

I have been laying this consolation to my heart lately. For some weeks we have been vexed here in an odd manner enough, and I am afraid that my landlady, who does her best for us all, has been very considerably distressed. And I am afraid, too, that for some time, at all events, I bore the trouble lightly, since it did not greatly affect my comfort or convenience. It began with the fall of the mirror that used to hang over the mantelpiece in my room. The thing came down in the dead of night with a bang and a crash that woke up the house. One of the lodgers, a young workman of some kind, said that the cords were sound and that it looked as if they had been violently torn. I don't think anybody paid much attention to this very improbable conjecture.

Mrs. Jolly, the landlady, was sorry to lose a handsome piece of furniture, as she considered it, and I think she feared the bad luck that is supposed to follow the breaking of a glass. And I was relieved to be rid of the horrid object. Then, not long afterwards, there was some more smashing. The furniture in a room on the floor above mine was thrown about in an extraordinary manner, and everything breakable was broken. Nobody could explain it. The police were called in, I believe quite ineffectually. The Inspector, or whatever he was, seems to have insinuated that Mrs. Jolly's daughter was somehow or other at the bottom of the mischief, but I believe the girl was down in the kitchen with her mother when the furniture was falling about over our heads. And again, I am afraid that beyond a general dislike of rows and disturbances of all kinds, I took no great interest in the affair. We are mostly selfish, not so much in an active as in a passive way. I was mildly sorry that a very decent woman should be harassed and be the worse off by three or four pounds; but my rest was not broken by the thought of Mrs. Jolly's troubles. When my own turn came, it is hardly necessary to state that I was moved more deeply.

I was working one afternoon at my desk. I wanted to consult a book which was on a shelf in my bedroom. I shut the door' of the sitting-room behind me and went into the bedroom next door. I was delayed a little in getting the book I wanted, as I had carelessly put it back in a hurry on the wrong shelf some weeks before. But I could not have been out of my sitting-room for more than three minutes. When I got back I was amazed and horrified to find one of the notebooks I had been using lying on the floor, torn to shreds and fragments. It might be possible, I thought, to piece it all together, at the cost of a great deal of time and trouble; but how on earth had it happened? I had not done it; that was certain. I am sometimes absent-minded. I juggle with small objects such as pipes and pens and pencils and look for them everywhere but in the place where I have laid them five minutes before: but I was very sure that I had not torn up my own notebook and forgotten all about it three minutes afterwards. Who had done it? I was the only lodger in the house at the time. I went down to the kitchen and found Mrs. Jolly asleep in her armchair and her daughter mending things by the window. I made some instruction about breakfast a little earlier to-morrow my excuse for disturbing them, and went back and stood bewildered in the middle of my room; not knowing in the least what to think of the scraps and fragments of paper littering the floor. "Look at the hangman when it comes home to him," I quoted somewhat harshly and irrelevantly from *Barnaby Rudge.* But I had been brought up hard against a blank wall. I gathered the torn pieces into a heap by the waste-paper basket, so that it might look probable, the result of an author's despair, when they brought up my tea-things; and I spent the rest of the evening and a good part of the night in doing a sort of jig-saw puzzle with the fragments, a bottle of gum, and a blank book. This was distraction of a kind; but, the one puzzle solved with tolerable success, the other presented

itself again, and remained — intolerable and unsolvable. I had to invent a deadly enemy for Mrs. Jolly before I could go to bed with any hope of going to sleep. I made my figment as plausible as I could. I feigned two opposition letters of lodgings in the same street, many years before, borrowing pretty freely from *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings.* There was competition and deadly enmity between the two. Finally, Mrs. Jolly had triumphed all along the line, and Mrs. X. bankrupt, sold up and utterly defeated, had fled the country. She had returned after the long years, had tracked Mrs. Jolly down, and was now wreaking vengeance on her old foe. She had lived amongst the Blackfellows of Australia, and had learnt their stealthy secrets. Her plan was, no doubt, to make No. 29 uninhabitable, to drive the lodgers away, and thus reduce Mrs. Jolly to ruin and beggary. And, for the time, this strange story served its turn. Later, I picked holes in it, detected improbabilities, doubted whether that sort of thing really happened; and yet reflected that, after all, the strangest things did happen, and that plots and stratagems quite as unusual were on record. There was clearly a trick, a series of tricks somewhere: manuscript books do not tear themselves any more than matchboxes fly off mantel-shelves of their own accord. My explanation of the notebook trick might not be altogether satisfactory; but it was good enough.

Within a few weeks, however, I was concerned in a number of misadventures, which, so far as I see, cannot be accounted for by the hypothesis I put forward to cover the incidents at 29 Layburn Street. I say I was concerned with these affairs, but this is not quite exact. I was present when they occurred; a different matter.

I was having my lunch — or rather dinner — at the Quill two days after the incident of the torn manuscript. I had just lit my pipe, when one of the big glass jars, used for holding spirits, standing on a shelf at the back of the bar, fell forward and smashed to pieces on the floor.

The next day, in the morning, I was going along Holborn on the top of a 'bus. A strong wind was blowing, and I was holding my hat. It was nearly blown away a few minutes before. On the south side of the street, near one of the Turnstiles into Lincoln's Inn Fields, I noticed a house, with high hoardings, and an elaborate galleried scaffolding in front of it. In a moment, just as we were going past, the whole structure seemed to fall to pieces and collapse, like a pagoda built of cards. The hoardings fell out on the pavement; the poles and planks of the scaffolding fell to right and left. I believe that a man employed in the rebuilding work and a passerby were injured, but not seriously.

On the afternoon of the same day I was walking back to my rooms by way of Oxford Street. I was passing a jeweller's shop when there was a crash of glass. There was a great jagged opening in one of the panes of the shopfront. There was a rush of people to the spot, yells and shouts, blowing of police whistles. Very much to my disgust I found myself in the centre of the

scrummage, and got pretty roughly handled — or, rather, shoved. I heard that nothing was stolen, and that nobody had seen the "smash and grab" man get away.

Three days later I had to see my solicitor on some business. We were discussing it in his room, when there was a loud crack and then the noise of a heavy fall. In the next room, separated from the one in which we were sitting by a wooden partition, the Letter Books of the firm were kept on shelves. A clerk wanted to consult one of these volumes dated thirty or forty years back, and standing on a high shelf. The man had gone up a library ladder to get the book. He was a heavy man, and they said there was a defect in the wood. The ladder broke and the clerk went headlong. But he was not seriously hurt, I am glad to say.

Four days later. Collapse of a cellar flap in Soho Street, just after I had walked over it.

The same day, a couple of hours afterwards. Precisely similar accident in the Caledonian Road; but in this case I was on the other side of the street.

Five days later. I could not settle down to my work on this particular evening, and went round to see a friend who had a flat — or lower part of a "converted" house — in the Finchley Road. As we were talking, there was a noise like thunder above us, and a shower of plaster covered us and everything in the room. My friend ran upstairs, and found that an old-fashioned wardrobe had fallen forward — jarred out of place, the people supposed, by the heavy traffic.

Next morning, I was going under the covered space between the Great Central Hotel and Marylebone Station. There was a splintering crash of broken glass, and something fell to the ground five or six feet to my left. It was a butcher's weight of four pounds. I heard a man say that it must have been flung out of one of the hotel windows. I do not know whether this was found to be the case.

In the ten days following there were four more incidents of the same order, in which I was present, though as I have said, and maintain, I was in no way concerned.

And I draw no conclusions whatever. I do not believe that there is any conclusion to be drawn. A good many people would say, I suppose, that it is highly improbable that one man should be present at, or at least in the near neighbourhood of, so many disasters in the course of three weeks and four days. It is not in the least improbable when the vastness of London and its myriad movements and activities are considered. No doubt, it appears strange, but the strangeness is only in appearance. It appears strange when a man gets an entire suit dealt to him at cards; in reality that hand of his is no stranger than any other combination of thirteen cards. The world is full of these

combinations, of events as well as of cards, which invite us to draw conclusions; to say, therefore, this, that or the other. But there is no "therefore". A man once thought it worth while writing to the paper to chronicle one of these odd coincidences. He bought a watch, he said, somewhere in the straits Settlements. Thirty years later, he was in London. The watch was out of order, and he walked into a shop, I think in Holborn, to have it seen to. The man across the counter who took the watch, was the man who had sold the watch in the far east all those years before. It happened so; and again, there is no "therefore", no conclusion to be drawn.

Nor was there any connexion between the broken bottles and smashed ladders and the events that have troubled us at the lodging-house in Layburn Street. In the latter case, I have no doubt that my fable was not far from the fact. Somebody had a grudge against my landlady and tried to scare away her lodgers and ruin her business. I don't profess to understand how the trick was done: I am puzzled. But then I am puzzled by the simplest card-trick— "choose a card. Put it back; don't show me where, etc., etc." — till they tell me how it is done. But the great thing to remember when one is confronted with apparent impossibilities is: there is a trick somewhere. As for the other smashes and crashes — the affairs of tavern and street, lawyer's office, and cellar flap — as I have noted, there is no puzzle here, no improbability, even much less impossibility. Here, the only thing to remember is that London stretches for ten miles in every direction, and that it contains more than eight million inhabitants.

3

It would appear that the last sentence in Hillyer's remarks on certain odd experiences that had befallen him — which he declined to consider odd — dwelt in his mind. He had evidently been thinking over the question of probabilities, and weighing their importance and their applicability to his own field of research. He continues his notes:

I was very much struck, when I was reading Whately's *Logic* for the first time, by a footnote on Probability. Indeed, I have forgotten the statement in the text thus annotated, but the note was to the effect that the Insurance Offices employed people whose business it was to estimate probability; to reduce it and transmute it from probability to certainty; and to do so with such nice exactness that the result of this marvellous process might be expressed in pounds, shillings, and pence — surely the utmost word of accuracy. Thus, if a man living near the Monument wanted to insure against the column falling on his house he will find, as I have been told, that the chances have been precisely reckoned, and that his yearly payment must be eighteen-pence per cent. And to me, such a process seems to grapple almost with the infinite, to draw very near to the land where Achilles will race past the tortoise and all

parallel straight lines will meet at last.

It must be confessed, however, that such a reckoning and most of those which are the matter of insurance calculations are material in their conditions and in their issues. There is a question whether a house will burn, a ship sink, or a tall column fall headlong. The likelihood of these events happening is estimated, and the chances are expressed in terms of money. But the material event and the monetary payments are not the process itself but the application of it to commercial purposes. By means of the process, the Insurance Office ascertains the exact degree of likelihood that the Monument will tumble down, and even the likelihood of its falling to east, west, north or south. And the result is expressed, for the special purposes of insurer and insured, in terms of eighteenpence per cent., per annum. But I see no reason why the method should not be applied to the things of the mind as well as the things of the body. And the question of money is accidental, not essential. Why is there not an office where, in return for a sufficient fee, one might be informed as to the exact chance of a man of the highest literary genius appearing in the next fifty years? We may be inclined to say that the question is incalculable, but this is probably not the case. There would be a difficulty, the affair would have to be in the hands of a college or society or brotherhood, since the highest genius is not always recognised in its own age. Shakespeare was, no doubt, held to be a very clever man in his own time, and was handsomely rewarded. His social position was, perhaps, something higher than that of a writer of successful farcical comedies in our day: he might be fairly equated in general esteem with the late W. S. Gilbert. Milton had to wait for some years: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats were not immediately acclaimed. Hence, the necessity of a college or permanent body, if we are to deal with the risk of a supreme genius being born: the college might have to wait a hundred years before the reply to its question could be tested. I like to think of some of the calculations to be made, of the strange reckonings that would go into the account. For example, suppose we simplify the problem, and deal only with England and with England merely from the time of Shakespeare onwards. How many have been born in that period? And then, what is the percentage of men of supreme literary genius? Supposing a hundred million lives: how many great masters should we expect? And, of course, apart from this drudgery of figures, there are the wider, vaguer, subtler, enquiries. Sometimes genius may depend to a certain extent on the attitude, atmosphere and fashion of the age; and it may be said that these are things that cannot be prophesied far in advance. But when Ascham denounced the *Morte d'Arthur* as a bad book, when the Elizabethan Puritans protested against holidays and feasts because it was written "six days shalt thou labour" — then Gradgrind and Bounderby rose clearly into view.

But there is one region into which the doctrine of probability cannot enter. That is the land where the Queen of the Fairies holds court, where they

give gold that turns into dead leaves; into dead ashes. There is no list of those who have gone down into that valley; merely hints and rumours that go on from age to age. Those who have visited the enchanted region are either unable or unwilling to give any very definite account of their experiences on their return. But it is to be gathered that a certain transformation or transmutation of the world is effected; both within and without.

CHAPTER IV

1

ONE OF THE STRANGE MATTERS OF DREAMING — Hillyer recurs here to what was perhaps a favourite subject — is the manner in which the dream sometimes bears witness to itself. Indirectly, not directly. Nobody says: “This is all true, and it is actually happening.” But the kind of dream of which I am speaking affirms its own reality by connecting itself with innumerable other experiences in the past, with a whole cycle of events, with a recognised group of characters, in fact, with life; but with a life that is wholly of dreamland. In our actual waking hours, we hear, or we read that our friend X is dead, or is appointed Governor of Kafiristan, or has discovered a new metal. But whatever fate may have befallen him, we are at once conscious of a whole circle of events, emotions, recollections, in all of which X had some share. X’s name brings X’s world with it; to a greater or less extent we also are inhabitants of that world, and find ourselves in familiar, recognised company. And so with these dreams. The main action of the dream is confirmed by a hundred subsidiary recollections. Say, we are to descend into a dark and obscure valley, deeply wooded, silent save for a faint ripple of water that seems to come from far away. We are to go down into this valley; and there is a secret to be discovered there, in the darkness underneath the trees. But we have heard of all this before; the adventure is well known; it has been described again and again; what were A and C and E saying about it a week ago? That all who went into that valley returned with a mark on their breasts? Or were they changed into...? And so on and so on: but however monstrous the matter of the dream, however mad its circumstances, all are entirely acceptable to the mind of the dreamer, and are perceived to be a part of daily and accustomed life, to be congruous with half a dozen or half a hundred associations and recollections. Sometimes, indeed, such a dream is so fixed and established in its (apparent) actuality, that it is with a very considerable effort that it is dismissed and discharged from the region of actual things when the sleeper awakes; and, as I have noted before, it may hang about the consciousness with a strange persistence, and become perhaps, at last recognised as part of the waking world: “something I must have read long ago,”

“something I heard when I was a boy and got all mixed up.” And I think also that it is the sense of continuity, of being a part of a familiar life, that leads some people to affirm that they dream of a certain place, of a certain

event or adventure, over and over again. The dream suggestion: "I have been here before,"

"I know what is coming next," and so forth, is so strong that the sleeper awakened is convinced that this particular dream is recurrent; that it repeats itself at intervals. Of course, there may be dreams which do recur; I believe that the case of the Cornishman who dreamed on two (or three?) successive nights that he saw Percival the Prime Minister being assassinated is well attested; but I hold that the great majority of (apparently) recurring dreams are to be explained in the manner I have suggested.

The point interests me personally. I have no doubt that a short time ago — I cannot fix a precise date — I had a singularly vivid dream. I was walking pretty briskly on the pavement of a London Street; of a street, rather, since I did not distinguish it, or recognise this feature or that; I simply took it for granted. I think I was conscious of a faint rustle as of leaves; but I am not sure of this. It was night-time, and evidently late since very few people were about. I was aware that I had an appointment, some end to my walk; but this end, whatever it was, was in the background of my mind, not continuously and sharply apprehended. I think this is often so in our waking hours. A man has settled that he is to meet Jones at a certain time and a certain place. He sets out to keep his appointment, and very likely dismisses it from his mind as he goes to that place. He may be thinking of politics or incunabula, or hybridising for most of the way; since the art of the young waterman, thinking of nothing at all, is a very difficult and rare achievement. So there was just this impression on my mind as I passed through the lighted street. Then I came to my journey's end. I was in Layburn Street. I knew it by the steep ascent of the road, and by the vague darkness of the group of trees at the top, where the way branche6 to left and right. And I was standing before number 29, the house in which I live. I was not in the least astonished to see the whole house blazing with light; shining out radiant into the night, and resonant with music. As it was, so it was accepted without question; in the manner after which St. Paul's Cathedral is accepted by people who go eastward up Ludgate Hill. I went up the steps, through the open door, and found myself not in Mrs.

Jolly's extremely modest apartments, but in a gorgeous palace. Here one would suppose, the absurdity should have arrested me, and brought the whole fabric of the dream crashing to the ground. It was not so. I knew that this was not the aspect of the place to which I was used. For an inappreciable instant of time, the jaundiced marble paper of the passage, the dingy carpet on the stairs, the sordid light that crept through the landing window were present to me; that, I recollected, was the accustomed greeting of the house. I quite appreciated the vast difference between that and this splendour into which I had entered; but I understood perfectly what had happened. For this, it seems, was one of those dreams which do not stand alone as solitary incidents, but are a part of a larger whole, and in relation to a whole world of circumstance.

And so the palace of golden and glorious light in which! Stood was utterly rational and acceptable. In the dream, I say, I was in the secret, I knew what had happened and how and why it had happened. It was all a part of a scheme which was perfectly familiar to me; I received it and rejoiced in it, not as one who is incredulous and all amazed at the coming of some tremendous unexpected good, saying to himself, scarcely daring to believe: "Then my dreams have come true!" but rather, as a man witnessing a happy ending which he has long foreseen in the fashioning of which he has, perhaps, played his part. I say, "a happy ending" for the figures about me were, I knew, possessed with the felicity that was in my heart. I was sharing in a great festival of ineffable joy. And the cause and reason of it were not hidden from me; I participated in the secret possessed by all, and could have uttered it in a word. But when I awoke, the word, though it was even then on my lips, was lost.

I find my recollection insisting very strongly on this master word. It was as if all the secret, all the magic of the adventure in which I supposed myself engaged were made by it and summed up in it. It was the cause of all and the end of all; the deep foundation stone and the highest pinnacle of the palace. If it were taken away, all would fall into ugly ruin. Indeed, I am reminded a little of the Lost Word which the Freemasons seek; and it is likely enough that the word of my dream arose from a confused recollection of the Masonic legend.

I have said that the dream was a singularly vivid one. So it was. Not so much in the recollection of its detail and imagery, as in my extraordinary conviction on awaking, and after awaking of having gone through a real and veritable experience. I can remember something of a certain ritual in which I joined, of which I was a witness. In the dream it all seemed just and right; in the awakening its strangeness was incredible. But not so much the external imagery as the inward felicity impressed itself upon me. And curiously (as I think) this felicity was very largely negative in its nature. Curiously, because I believe that most of us regard happiness, or joy, or well-being or what you will, as a positive thing, based on what a man has gained, or received, or possessed himself of in one way or another: it is an affair of having. But in the dream my delight — and it was greater than words can utter — was founded not on what I had gained, but on what I had lost. What I had lost was all the burden of life. I do not think that many of us realise what that amounts to. Perhaps it might be said that we do not know that it is there — till it has dropped off. And who can tell of this experience? Very few, I suppose; and I only of a belief in a dream.

For the burden of life is made up of an infinite number of little things. The great sorrows, the terrible losses, the horrible defeats, the remorse for grievous misdoings: these are in the pack, but there is much more. It is piled up with the trifles that we suppose we have forgotten. There are few days on

which we do not do something amiss. There are few days on which something is not done amiss to us. There are few days on which something amiss does not happen, without our fault or the fault of another. I think if you put this to the next man he would probably admit that this is so. “But,” he would add, “I’ve no time to think of trifles. Thingumbob did give me a nasty look in the train; and I’m afraid I was a bit short with Whatd’yecall; and the chop I had for lunch was as tough as hell. But I’m not bothering much about little things like that. I’ve got more serious matters to think of.” He is perfectly sensible and perfectly right; and if he did otherwise he would in all probability go mad. Nevertheless, this wise neglect of trifles does not abolish them or annihilate them. They are, very properly, dismissed from the working, practical memory. But they sink down, one by one, into their appointed depths; and every day the burden grows a little heavier though the greater part of the small odds and ends that stuff it are forgotten. But all the time the weight is on the shoulders; a constant part of life. The trifles are forgotten, and so they survive. We have striven with the great troubles: the deadly wrongs and sins, the grievous sorrows and losses have been in greater or less measure encountered and accounted for; their measure has been taken, their sting drawn. And the odds and ends are set on one side, neglected and, as we say, forgotten; and yet surviving: the burden of life.

It was all this heavy burden that in my dream was taken from me, and I was raised up in an instant from thick darkness to shining light; knowing only in that instant how heavy the burden had been. And so I say that the felicity which I enjoyed was negative; and I remember vaguely receiving some intimation that this was but the first degree of a new life, that there were brighter enlightenments and far more intense joys to succeed in their order.

And I awoke out of all this astounding fantasy of sleep into our common actual world, which I, like most other men, had found bearable enough, and often enjoyable. I awoke into misery, as one who has been for the second time put out of Paradise. I had lost the word; the golden world had fallen into dust. And as I have noted, I could not persuade myself that it had been a solitary experience. It was rather the culmination of a long series of such dreams; not the same dream, perhaps, but all of the same order.

2

Mrs. Jolly, the landlady of 29, Layburn Street, wished with all her heart that she had never called in the police. There had been no more breakages of furniture — she knew nothing of the affair of Hillyer’s torn manuscript — and the house had regained its ancient peace. She gave no credit to the police on that account. She felt sure that it would have been just the same if they had never come near the place, prying and poking about, and talking a lot of nonsense, as if they knew all about it. Couldn’t find out who

was breaking up the home; never said a word as to how she was going to get her money back that she spent on new things for Mr. Zerny's room, nor about that beautiful glass of Aunt Bessie's, that was worth pounds — and if you had the money to spend, you wouldn't get anything a half or a quarter as good in these times; they couldn't make them like that now. All that policeman fellow did was to come round and ask a lot of impudent questions about her daughter, making his insinuations that were nothing better than falsehoods and lies; you couldn't call them nothing but lies, and the poor girl standing by that very table all the time. "Fits, indeed! I'd give him fits, and see how he liked it" — so Mrs. Jolly ended her secret; the last words spoken aloud, as if they had been: *Per omnia sæcula saculorum. Amen.*

The fact was, that the Inspector had been stirring again. He had made up his mind firmly that the girl was, somehow or other, at the bottom of the trouble at No. 29. He did not know exactly how she had done it. He brushed aside the alibi that Mrs. Jolly had set up for her daughter: "The sort of woman who would say anything if she thought her daughter was likely to get into trouble." He remembered the dictum of a master detective to the effect that it would be a good thing if all girls between fifteen and twenty could be shut up somewhere, as the police would then be saved a lot of trouble. But, anyhow, the officer summed up in his mind, it was not a matter for police action, and that was all about it. And then, a month or so later, odd rumours came to his ears, information of a cloudy and perplexing kind was received, and the Inspector found that Mrs. Jolly's house was again his business; or looked as if it might possibly become his business.

A sort of forewarning of the trouble that was to come was vouchsafed to the landlady — if she could have taken it in that light. Marketing in Exeter Street, Islington, she met a neighbour and acquaintance, Mrs. Teed of Baker Street. They were politic for a while over cabbages and kippers, and then Mrs. Teed remarked:

"I always say it's pleasant to have cheerful people about you. You and I, Mrs. Jolly, we know well enough that there's no fortune in lodgings, and I'm sure there's plenty of work. So, as I say, if the lodgers are cheerful and like a bit of fun it's all the better for all concerned. Though some would call it burning the candle at both ends. There's your Mr. Pytle now. Up for the best part of the night, and off first thing in the morning. However can he do it? But there you are: one man's meat is another man's poison, as granny used to say. Well, I've got to buy a rabbit before I get home, so good morning to you, Mrs. Jolly. Rather warm, I find it."

Mrs. Jolly received this farago in a dumb and gaping silence; stupid with perplexity, with searching for meaning where, for her, no meaning was. She had not the remotest notion of what Mrs. Teed was talking about. "Burning the candle at both ends!" Who burned it? Once or twice, certainly, Mr. Zerny and the other young man on the top floor had been to a Palais de

Danse, and had not got home till late; but it had not happened three times in the last six months, and not at all for six weeks or more; she knew that. They were steady young fellows, both of them. Came in from their work, brought home sausages for her to cook sometimes, sometimes a tin of salmon, went out again as a rule after supper, and had a pint of beer in the private bar of the Quill, and mostly called "good night" to her down the stairs, as they came in. And not a sound or a song from them till seven o'clock the next morning. Whatever could Mrs. Teed be thinking of? As for Mr. Pytle, at his time of life; the woman must be off her head to think of such a thing. Every Sunday morning of his life regular at the Barnsbury Chapel, Baptist, and taught Sunday school till that bad cough took him last winter. And Mr. Hillyer as quiet as quiet, and his nose never out of his books. Revolving such things, Mrs. Jolly walked home in an indignant daze. Again and again she sought for a clue and found none, and could only wonder many times what on earth the woman was thinking about. And Inspector Martin was making his stealthy enquiries as to her and as to all the lodgers under her roof.

For the fact was that a man lodging in a house on the other side of the street, a little higher up, was employed Fleet Street way, in the mechanical department of a newspaper, and thus was accustomed to get back from his work at about three o'clock in the morning. And he had been much astonished at strange things to be seen in Layburn Street at that hour, for three or four nights running. He declared that No. 29 was blazing and bursting with light, the brightest, whitest light he had ever seen. "Were the blinds all up, then?" he was asked. He couldn't say about that, he hadn't noticed whether they were up or down. It was all ablaze, that was all he could say; he didn't think anything of blinds or curtains either. And as to seeing anybody through the windows, there again, the man was drawn blank. He didn't know; there might be people inside, or there might not be. He thought he was dazzled with the light and could see nothing else. And this story, variegated, embroidered, illuminated in all colours, went abroad in the quarter in many versions. Mrs. Teed, as we may conjecture, had heard that there were such doings at Mrs. Jolly's, a party every night, and up to any hours, and people going home with the milk. "A gay lot, and no mistake," was the opinion of those who held this view of the case. But there were darker opinions. There was talk of clubs, more specifically of nightclubs; of gambling clubs, of drinking clubs, of dance instructresses — here were sneers and bitter laughter — of whiskey served in coffee cups, and — worst of all— "champagne galore". Mrs. Jolly, on her marketing excursions and perambulations grew conscious that things were, somehow, different from usual. She found herself coming in upon muttered confidences, which ceased at her approach. She would hear: 'There she is! That's Mrs. Jolly," as she passed on her way. The shopmen received her orders with a new attention. Some of her friends greeted her with curious smiles, others frowned moral judgments; and smiles and frowns alike enraged and perplexed her, and she felt inclined to ask herself, in the Hillyer manner,

whether she were asleep or awake.

And then, a very summit of annoyance and affliction, Inspector Martin called, with bland enquiries. Of course it was the night-club stories of the strange doings at 29, Layburn Street that had attracted his interest. These, in the course of a week or ten days, had assumed a remarkable solidity and consistency. The folk-lore imagination of the neighbourhood had been at work; details at first vague and conjectural, were now clear cut, precise, undoubted. Gaming dropped out of the account; drink and worse evils took its place. The Inspector was doubtful at first.

"There must be a lot of cars and taxis drawing up before the house, then," he remarked, to a voluble informant. "I should have thought we would have heard about it from the man on the beat."

"Not a bit of it; they're too artful for that. They don't come near the street. One pulls up at the corner of Theobald's Road, and another one may go right into King's Cross Station, d'you see? There may be a couple stop in Acton Street, and another in Lloyd's Square, and one more by the Free Hospital in Gray's Inn Road, that's how they do it. And the toffs don't mind a bit of a walk, so long as they can keep it snug."

The Inspector had heard of such unworthy dodges before; he began to think there was something in it. But there were grave improbabilities. Mrs. Jolly had been the tenant of 29, Layburn Street for many years; there was nothing against her or the house or any of her lodgers. He had looked into them, when the police were called in over that smash-up on the top floor; and there was nothing against any of them. Still, he went round and began to put his bland suggestions. Whereupon, to his amazement, Mrs. Jolly turned on him in her fury, and told her story. Of mutterings and whisperings in the market-place, of Mrs. Teed and her madness, of nods and scowls and smiles of innuendo. It was a vague tale enough, but there was bewildered rage behind it, and the landlady vowed she would have them up in the police court, if they went on with their wicked lies and backbiting. And the officer went away to make further enquiries, and they led him into quicksands and swamps of fabrications and contradictions, but to no certain ground of fact whatever. For the newspaper mechanic had been sent by his firm to Newcastle-on-Tyne; and no one else had seen the bright and shining appearances of Layburn Street. And so all the superstructures, the castles and domes and palaces of loose talk, and vain invention that had been built upon the man's story fell apart, were disintegrated, and dispersed into shapeless mists.

3

NOT LONG AGO, A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, perhaps — said the eminent nerve specialist — a rather queer case came my way. He had had

a fright, and had gone to the first brass plate that he saw in his neighbourhood. The G.P. sent him on to me; and he came round in a very shaky condition. His eyes were in an odd state. I should have suspected opium, but he said that he had never taken hypnotics of any kind, and I believed him. Well, he told me his story. He had been putting coals on the fire or doing something equally ordinary, and he suddenly found himself, as he put it, thinking gibberish; forming in his mind sentences entirely wanting in sense of any sort, absolute incoherence, as far as I could make out. He gibbered to himself, and wondered whether he were dreaming, or quoting out of a book which he didn't remember reading. And then it struck him that he wasn't exactly clear as to who he was or where he was, or what he was doing there. I gathered that he wasn't quite sure whether he was alive or dead for the next hour or so.

I got him to tell me about himself; where he lived, and what he did, and how he passed his time generally. Well in the first place, it seemed he had been living for twenty years or more in some unearthly part of London that nobody had ever heard of or ever goes to; somewhere in the north, off the Gray's Inn Road or the King's Cross Road. He lived in two rooms in a lodging house, said "thank you" twice a day to his landlady, and "good evening" to a fellow-lodger about once a week. Hardly any friends, never went out except now and then to the B.M. Reading Room, and was absorbed in the study of some branch of folklore, as well as I could gather. He was a clear case of Claustrophilia. He had got into the way of shutting himself up, living alone, never speaking to anybody, avoiding the society of his fellow-creatures, dreading the very thought of society of any kind. And the result was, he'd got himself into a devil of a state. In a very few weeks, I should think he would have lost his memory and his identity and have been found wandering about, wondering who he was and where he lived. Or he might have killed himself. There's a great deal of sound observation, you know, in that chapter in *Pickwick* about the old Inns of Court, and the people who shut themselves up in them.

I told this patient of mine that he must have a thorough change; get away to the sea, stay somewhere where he would meet people and be pretty well forced to talk to them, read the papers, take an interest in things in general, and so on and so on. I warned him that if he stuck in his old rut, he'd be seeing things before he was much older. As a matter of fact, I didn't think the trouble would take that form; but I thought I'd better give him a bit of a fright. Anyhow, I gathered later that he had followed the prescription, and gone to a seaside place; and as he said, had felt very much better, in fact, quite well.

"And I feel quite well now," he told me, the next time I saw him. "But..."

It was a very big "but" indeed. I had seen him for the first time at the end of May. He came to me again in the beginning of the October of the same

year. Before listening to what he had to say — I stopped him as he was beginning his story — I made the usual examination, and put him through the ordinary tests. He was right in saying that he felt well; he was well. Everything as sound as it could be in a man in the 'fifties; and a good deal sounder, I should say, than the average man of that age. But the fellow was frightened out of his life. What at? He suffered from a delusion; and it was the most extraordinary delusion that I've ever come across. His delusion was that he thought he was going mad. "You know," he said, "that you warned me that if I didn't take care I should be seeing things." And then he began to tell me all about it; but before he got very far, I stopped him. I saw that there were some very singular and, indeed, unique features about the case — so far as my experience goes. It was getting late in the morning, and I had an important consultation in half an hour, and I wanted to go into the case thoroughly, without bothering about the time. As it happened, my wife was going to some show that evening with friends; so I asked him if he would mind coming round after dinner to talk the whole thing over in comfort. And I told him to cheer up; there was nothing to be frightened about. "Nothing to be frightened about?" he repeated. "Then you think it was really there?"

In the evening I heard the whole story from first to last. I settled him in a comfortable chair, and he lit his pipe, and sipped at his whiskey and soda as if he enjoyed it. That told me something. I knew that his trouble, whatever it was, had nothing to do with alcohol. An alcoholic patient doesn't sip whiskey and soda as if he enjoyed it. He takes it as people take very nasty medicine: a shudder and a clutch and down it goes, with an ugly quiver of the face to follow.

The tale began with his stay at a seaside town in Wales, where he had gone to carry out my advice. He said he had enjoyed it very much. He read the papers every day as I had told him, and got up some sort of an interest in what he found in them; he even went through the social gossip and the "Woman's Page", I gathered — which is more than I can do. He talked to the people at the hotel, and tried to play with their children on the sands; in fait, he carried out my directions and took his medicine like a Briton. He said he felt better every day; so well indeed, after two or three weeks of the treatment that he felt it would be safe to relax a little. You see, I don't think he would ever be a sociable man at heart. He struck me as the sort of fellow who might have a few intimate friends — though, I gathered, this had not been the case — but casual come and go acquaintance and casual chatter would always represent a bit of an effort to him. So he thought that as he had been such a good boy, he might allow himself a holiday between breakfast and lunch, and he took to strolling about the dunes in the morning by himself, and finally fixed on a sort of natural amphitheatre, a pleasant turfy, flowery sort of place, where he sat and smoked and felt pleased with himself and everything. "And that was the beginning of the trouble," he said. He reproached himself for his over-

confidence, and for disobeying my orders, as he put it. He felt quite sure that if he had stuck to instructions and kept among other people all the time, he would have been quite all right. He soon found, as he declared, the bad results of getting back even for two or three hours a day to his solitary habits. He began to have delusions. He was convinced, he said, that the people at his hotel were no longer friendly. He was sure they were talking about him among themselves. They looked at him in a very odd way. Parties broke up when he came near them.

They spied on him when he was sitting in his favourite hollow in the dunes. One of them asked him why he didn't bring his friend to the hotel. At last, nobody would speak to him, and the manager asked him to leave. The man said the other guests accused him of consorting with a suspected murderer. My patient left the hotel and took lodgings in the town. And then, one day when he was at his old place, the green round, a whole gang rushed him and held him, while they looked for somebody who wasn't there, who, they were quite sure, had been there a moment before.

He went back to town after that, feeling naturally, a good deal upset. He assured me that he was absolutely convinced at the time that everything had happened just as he had told it to me.

"Once or twice," he said, "I had a horrible qualm. I remembered what you had told me about the state of my nerves, and your hint that things might get very much worse if I didn't take care of myself. I asked myself:

'Are you quite certain that all that really happened?' But I was quite certain; so certain that I was thoroughly reassured. I took it that for some reason or other, I didn't in the least know what, these people at the hotel had taken a dislike to me, and that the whole thing was a very ill-natured practical joke to get me out of the place. I tried to remember what I could have done to offend them. Then I recollected that I had said something that had annoyed an old general very much indeed. I hadn't the smallest intention of being offensive; in fact, I was trying to make myself agreeable to his daughter, but I saw afterwards that I had put my foot into it very badly. The general got into a foaming rage, and of course I apologised most humbly, and called myself the worst names I could think of. I thought I was forgiven, but when things turned out as they did, and I went back to town, I thought it all over, and came to the conclusion that the old man was still furious and had taken it out of me in his own way. And, in a way, that set my mind at ease."

"And now," I said to him, "you think the whole business was a delusion?"

"I am quite sure of that, I am sorry to say," he replied. And then he went on with his tale. It was certainly an odd one. The man was struggling you know, all the time against falling back into his foolish way of living, before I had warned him of what that sort of thing led to. He took a certain

amount of exercise, I gathered; walked about London, went on 'bus rides, did no work in the morning. And he was almost morbidly over-anxious to avoid the mere suspicion of morbidity of any kind. When he found himself indulging in fancies that were a little off the main track of life, he pulled himself together and read the daily paper for all he was worth. That was all very well; but I can't help thinking that the subject in which he was interested, the psychology of certain folk-lore legends, so far as I could gather, was not exactly the best direction for his thoughts. I told him that the Queen of Fairyland — she seemed the principal bee in his bonnet — was rather of pathological than psychological interest; and I may say, by the way, that in my opinion, legends of this kind are simply confused and fanciful reports of cases of hyperæsthesia. Still, a man may have a crazy hobby and be quite sound apart from it; and that was the way this patient impressed me. But queer things happened to him. He had not been back in London long, when his morning walk took him to some God-forsaken little square somewhere near his rooms, and he sat down on one of the benches to smoke and meditate. There were two old men on another bench, and he noticed presently that one of them was staring at him in a very queer sort of way — as if he saw something that frightened him, as my patient put it. He turned away and looked at the houses of the square, and admired the gardens in front of him; but when he glanced towards the bench opposite, there was the old fellow glaring in terror: "Not exactly at me, but as though he saw something on the bench beside me. He looked so frightened that he frightened me. The other old chap was puffing at his pipe and seemed as cheerful as possible; but I got up and went away, feeling a little disturbed and uneasy. Then it struck me that one old man was, perhaps, a little queer in the head, and that the other was a friend who took him out and looked after him; and I thought no more of it."

Then he went on to tell me about things being smashed up in the house where he lodged. A big mirror over the fireplace in his sitting-room, some chairs and crockery on the floor above him, a notebook that he had left on his desk for two or three minutes, torn to pieces. And then a long list of breakages and smashes that had happened when he was about, in all sorts of places: in a public-house, in an office, in the street. I told him that there was nothing in all that beyond coincidence. London was a big place; hoardings would blow down, and things get broken and ladders give way — I am giving some of his misadventures. He told me that that was exactly the way he talked to himself; he wouldn't admit that there was anything queer, anything to be uneasy about. He stuck out against it, as he said, and accounted for everything on commonsense lines. He said he had made up a story about someone who had quarrelled with his landlady to explain her broken furniture and his torn notebook.

"Well," I said, "that sounds a likely story enough, so far as I can see. I don't make out the bearing of all this upon your case. The only advice I can

give you is to change your rooms. I'm told there's very snug lying in Kensington."

He grinned at the allusion; but then it all came out. He had hinted at something of the kind at the beginning of his story. He was convinced that there was not a word of truth in it from beginning to end. He was sure that he was suffering from delusions; that nothing had happened as he had told it, that all that trouble at the seaside place was imaginary, and that nothing had been smashed, broken, or damaged in any way; either in his rooms or out of them. I reminded him of the torn notebook.

"You have evidence of that at least," I pointed out. "You told me you fitted the torn scraps together and pasted them into a new book." But he had his answer. No doubt, he had torn the book to pieces himself, and then had forgotten all about it.

I was beginning to get extremely interested in the man. There was something exceptional about him. It is not usual for paranoiacs to insist on their insanity. As a rule, they are quite certain that their wildest delusions are hard facts. You may have a man worth a hundred thousand pounds who is quite certain that he will be in the workhouse in a week. You show him his bank-book with the hard figures. It's no good. Either, the bank is in the plot or else there are huge debts which nobody knows about. The man is dead sure that he is a beggar; and that the figures in the bankbook are part of a conspiracy. And here was this patient insisting that a mass of experiences which he had taken for facts at the time were the creations of his diseased brain. I determined to settle the matter one way or the other by a very simple test. I got dates, places, and addresses out of him, and noted them down. "Now," I said, "I believe that your case is a very hopeful one. I am almost sure that it will yield to treatment. Go down to Brighton for a fortnight, and come and see me on October 17th, in the evening."

I proceeded to apply the test I had thought of. As it happened I knew the seaside place he had stayed at in the early summer, and I had stayed at the same hotel. I wrote to the manager and put the case to him just as I had heard it from the patient. I asked him to let me know, confidentially, whether anything of the kind had taken place, whether the circumstances were as represented. He wrote to me confirming the patient's story in every particular, so far as the facts came under his knowledge. He said that some of the people staying in his hotel declared that they had seen my patient in a certain spot on the Burrows, in company with a horrible-looking man, who, they were quite sure, was the man wanted by the police for the Ty Captain murder. He added, that he understood from some talk in his lounge that after my friend had left the hotel there had been some kind of scuffle on the Burrows, and he hoped that nothing would get into the papers.

That was one point. Then I took up the business of the breakages at his

lodgings. There again the patient's story was absolutely confirmed; even to the torn notebook. The landlady's daughter remembered seeing the carpet all littered with bits of paper with writing on them one afternoon, when she took up the gentleman's tea things. Then, he had told me that when he called on his solicitor, a library ladder with a clerk on it came to grief in the next room. It was perfectly true. I saw the clerk, who was still limping a bit, and I saw the lawyer. That was enough for me. A most extraordinary case; the absolute reverse of the conditions we are usually called on to deal with. Many mental cases think they are persecuted when they aren't; this man had been persecuted in a sort of a way, and was quite sure that his persecution was a delusion; in other words, that he was mad. He was as sane as I am. And, yet, was he? I began to wonder. We say that a man who sees a cow in the garden which isn't there is mad. What about the man who sees a cow in the garden which is there, and says it isn't; that it's the creation of his morbid brain? Theoretically, that's a nice point; but such cases are so rare that I don't think it has ever come up for judgment. Anyhow, my business was practical, and I thought I should be able to untie the knots into which the man had wound himself.

He kept his appointment. I told him what I had done. I put the facts before him, fair and square. I shewed him that in every instance in which I had tested his statements he had been proved veridical and accurate in the smallest particular. Of course I suppressed that odd query that had risen in my mind. I said:

"Let's take the principal case. You said you were cold-shouldered by those people at the hotel. Well; it's quite true. The whole hotel staff noticed it. You say the manager asked you to leave. He did. Here's his letter. You say you were attacked as you were sitting in your favourite place in the dunes — or Burrows, as they seem to call them. Look at the bottom of the page: 'some sort of a scuffle on the Burrows'. And now what have you got to say for yourself?"

I expected him to look intensely relieved. He didn't. He looked puzzled. He didn't speak for some time. He looked down at the carpet and seemed to be weighing something in his mind; going over it, and again going over it, in a maze of perplexity. At last he spoke. He looked at me. There was terror in his face.

"If you are right," he said, and the words were blurred together as he uttered them, "if you are right: who is that horrible child that follows me wherever I go?"

And the story came out. About three weeks or a month before his second visit to me, he became vaguely conscious, as he said, that he was watched. He couldn't be more exact. He felt that there was an eye on him; there was somebody just outside his line of vision. He felt sure that if he

turned his head sharply, he would see the watcher, as he called him. And then again, he said to himself: “This is a mere fancy; liver trouble, or, perhaps, eye trouble. Of course there is nobody there.” He did turn round at last, and there was nobody there. Still, the sense of being watched persisted; not throughout the whole day, but at intervals. He would be on one of his walks and suddenly have a very strong feeling that someone was “in attendance”, walking on the other side of the street, a little to the rear, and keeping an intent eye on him all the time. Or he might be in his room, sitting at his desks writing or reading; and he would get the same notion that he was being observed, and feel obliged to look under the sofa, or move the big armchair, to make sure that the room was empty, except for himself. And in five minutes the sensation would return; he was sure that “there was somebody there.” On one occasion, he crept across the room on tiptoe, flung open the door with a crash, and rushed out — and, naturally, didn’t find anyone on the landing. Then, with the liver notion in his head, he dosed himself with medicine; but that was no good. There was still that recurring sense of the attendant watcher, not seen, but felt to be present; sometimes only for a moment. One day, he said, he had taken out his latch-key and was just putting it into the lock of the front door, when the sudden conviction rushed on him that someone was standing immediately behind him. He spun round in an instant. The usual result: no one there. Another time, he had gone into the country, and was strolling along a Hertfordshire byeway, when it struck him that he was being followed by his persecutor, who crept along all the while on the other side of the hedge. He was sure that he would get the fellow this time. He jumped over the first stile he came to, and looked all along the straight hedge. And then pulled himself together, asked himself why he had been such a fool. Of course, there was nobody on the other side of the hedge; there never had been. He was out of sorts. In a woman his condition would be called hysterical; he must exercise it out of him. So he walked ten miles at four miles an hour, got home and slept like a log — and woke up with a start at four in the morning and searched the wardrobe.

This state of things went on for about ten days. The man was getting distressed and a little shaky, but he held stoutly to his opinion that the trouble was due to something wrong physically. Then one day when he was wandering about the rather dreary part he lives in, he felt, as he told me, that the whole thing was lifted from him, as if a heavy pack had been taken off his back. He felt as if he must do something festive; have a big drink or go to the British Museum and find somebody to talk to. And as he was hesitating, he saw a very ugly little boy standing by a lamp-post on the other side of the road, and grinning at him: “Something twisted and deformed about the creature; he had the old face of a dwarf.” He went on his way, to a pub or the Reading Room, I don’t know which. As he was walking up the steep street where he lives on his way home, he saw the dwarfish child again. He was standing in the middle of the road this time, with that evil grin still on his face.

My patient hated the sight of him, supposed he lived somewhere in the neighbourhood, and thought no more about it. The next day, he was wandering about Kew Gardens, and as he was going along the rhododendron walk, he heard a rustle; and there was the imp looking at him from a rhododendron bush. He didn't understand it at all. He was on his way back on the top of a 'bus and looking about him for an old inn he remembered years ago on the London side of Turnham Green. There was the little horror glaring at him from an open window in the roof of one of the houses. For a moment he thought of stopping the 'bus and going to the house — the ground floor was a grocer's shop — and making enquiries, under the pretence of warning the people that their little boy was in a dangerous position at the open window above. But then what he called a cold thrill at his heart warned him to do nothing of the kind. He began to fear the possible solution of the puzzle. For a week after that there was no trouble. Then one morning, as he woke up, he saw that hideous little shape by his door. It appeared to open the door. It went out and the door was closed. He screamed in his terror, and the landlady ran up the stairs to his room. He asked her, as soon as he could speak plainly, who that horrible child was, and what it was doing in his room. He noticed the look of shock and alarm on the woman's face. She mumbled something about her sister's child, how they were afraid he wasn't quite so strong in the head as he might be, and promised to keep the child downstairs. He didn't believe a word of this; and not long after he broke down completely, and became quite sure that this hateful visitant was but one of the delusions from which he had suffered all the summer. And then he came to me.

I heard him to the end of his story. I was puzzled. It really looked as if this last business was a delusion. I asked him if he had been troubled at Brighton. He said he thought there had been something on the platform when he got out of the train on his arrival; otherwise he had been left in peace.

"But," he said, "as I was ringing your bell to-night, I looked round, and it walked away towards Cavendish Square."

The man was miserably depressed. I did what I could to cheer him a little. I said it was a very singular case — that was true enough, I told him that I was certain he could be cured. There was more hope than certainty about that pronouncement; but I pointed out that he had been almost if not quite free from the mischief at Brighton, and that a long sea voyage would most likely cure him for good and all. I made an appointment for him to see me in a week's time. As soon as he was gone, I wrote to his landlady. I didn't say too much. I told her that her lodger, my patient, was suffering from nervous depression, that I thought of ordering him a sea voyage, and I asked her if she could manage to keep her little nephew as much out of his way as possible for the next week or so. She answered me that the only nephew she had was a man of thirty who was a carpenter at Devizes; that she had made up the tale to try to make the gentleman more easy in his mind, but she was afraid he was in

a bad way, and she was frightened about him. The patient did not keep his appointment, and I went round to his place that evening. He had walked out of the house the day before, carrying a brown paper parcel, not like luggage, more like a parcel for the post. He had left a note for the landlady on his table. There was a month's money instead of notice in it. A well-known firm would call for his books and store them, and the landlady could have his clothes. He said he was going abroad for his health.

I have seen nothing more of him. But I have heard, indirectly, that he is living somewhere in the near east; and I understand that he is quite well. An odd case, as I said.

EPILOGUE

DR. WILLIAM BROWN, WHO IS,! BELIEVE, READER in Psychology, at the University of Oxford, saw some very extraordinary things one evening at the National Laboratory for Psychical Research. The date was sometime in the spring of this year, 1932; and the occasion was a "sitting" to test the powers of the young Austrian, Rudi Schneider. Dr. Brown was immensely impressed at the time. If I remember rightly, he said he had seen things done of which he could find no explanation on ordinary physical lines. I have forgotten the exact nature of the phenomena, but, let us say, the law of gravity was flagrantly broken. Solid objects soared and floated instead of falling; all possibility of trickery or conjuring apparatus being excluded, in the judgment of the expert scientific observers, of whom Dr. Brown was one. Dr. Brown wrote two letters to *The Times* on the subject; and the second letter does not so much qualify the first, as make the necessary reservation of the immensity of our ignorance; a reservation which applies to all our experiences and all our knowledge. "I am still unable," Dr. Brown wrote, in this second letter, "to dispute the genuineness of the phenomena that I witnessed. On the other hand, the extensive *lacuna* in my knowledge of this wider circle of facts prevents me from going sponsor for the phenomena, in spite of their immediate impressiveness." And that means, I take it, that the scientific mind is loath to accept isolated supernormal phenomena which have no theory behind them, no *logos* to rationalise them, no scheme in which they can be fitted. The man of science sees a phenomenon, which he judges to be a contravention of the laws of nature, as these laws are known to him. He cannot deny, he cannot explain away what he has seen; and yet he cannot unreservedly accept it, because of the *lacuna,* the gaps in his knowledge. A mass of lead, ten pounds in weight, let us say, has floated gently up to 'the ceiling, hovered there, and slowly fluttered down again. Our scientific witness has seen it happen, and yet he will not accept it as an undoubted fact; because nobody can furnish him with an acceptable and reasoned theory explaining how lumps of lead, under certain conditions, will behave exactly in this way.

Such, to the scientific observer, was the case of Rudi Schneider; such, also, is the case of Lawrence Hillyer. The *lacuna*, the gaps in the history are both wide and deep. And they are of two kinds; the gaps in any theory which can be constructed of what actually happened to Hillyer; and then the *lacuna* in the actual story, gathered in odd pieces from here and from there, and put together doubtfully, conjecturally; without any very strong conviction, in some instances at any rate, that this jig goes into that saw.

A good deal of the material available is derived from Hillyer's

notebooks. His landlady, anxious to tell all that there was to be told, mentioned the brown paper parcel which he was seen carrying away with him. This contained the notebooks in question; and I was the consignee. I had known Hillyer as most of his friends knew him, slightly, in the on-and-off fashion, for a good many years. He enclosed a letter to the effect that he thought some of his notes were in my way and might interest me. If not, I was to destroy them; he had no further use for them. He ended: "I have managed to get myself into a very extraordinary state, which I think is dangerous. I am going abroad, far abroad, to see if I can get free. I don't think of coming back to England, or of renewing any of my old interests."

I heard from him in the course of last summer. He has settled in Aleppo, where he has some interest in the sponge trade, and according to his own story, is doing very fairly well. He has never attempted to give me any account of what happened to him in the year 1929; chiefly, I think," because he doesn't know what did happen to him. Hence the fragments, hence the gaps, hence the rough, unfinished ends in the tale. Sometimes there has been frank reconstruction, in the manner of our modern historians. For example, there is that scene in the north London square, in which Hillyer and two old men were oddly engaged. There are foundations; something of the kind must have happened. The authorities are, partly Hillyer's statement to the specialist, and partly a puzzling and confused argument between the two old codgers, overheard fortuitously in a private bar somewhere deep in Barnsbury. Then there are uncertainties. There is that business of Hampole and his book, *A London Walk*, which melts into the story of Hillyer's mysterious visitor — or of a very bad dream. And the bright light which a man — and only one man, apparently — saw pouring from the house where Hillyer lodged, in the dead of night. That is a loose end, and I must leave it loose.

But there can be no doubt that Hillyer was subjected to a series of very horrible tricks, of varying orders. And here we come to the *lacuna* of theory. At one time, as in the Green Round of the sandhills, and in the square by the Caledonian Road, his attendant was invisible to himself, but visible to others, or rather, to some others. Then, in the last stages, before his flight, the dwarfish child of his terror was seen by no eye but his own; so far as we know, at least. At other times, the power that troubled him converted him into an involuntary *poltergeist*: destruction was about all his ways. Here, however, the proceedings followed the established order, and we may even grasp at least the tail of a theory. For it is certain that the *poltergeist* — when it is not a naughty child, playing mischievous tricks — is always involuntary and unconscious of its own work. It has no more volition, control, or direction of the energy which it transmits than has the wire of the electric current which passes along it.

But as to the origin of the experiences to which Lawrence Hillyer was subjected: some light, I think, is thrown on the problem by the strange

adventure of Mr. Smith of Wimbledon, as I have called him; the gentleman who, paying a chance visit to his favourite seaside town found to his horror and indignation the Green Round, the peaceful retreat on the sand-dunes, turned into a sort of 'Fun City', vile with the dissonant jargon of the jazz band struggling against the shriek and clangour of roundabouts, jigging with dancers of uncouth measures, a centre of vulgar and raucous merriment. The newspaper discussion which his letter set going went off very quickly into all sorts of foolishness and irrelevance; and nobody seemed to notice the very vital point, that the Town Clerk of the Welsh watering-place in question wrote a formal and full denial of Mr. Smith's story. The Town Clerk said that there was no jazz band on the dunes or anywhere near them. He denied the band, the roundabouts, the Palais de Danse, the hard tennis courts, and all the riot of sound and sight that Smith described. He admitted a fair held by ancient charter in a field on the other side of the town; and he rather hinted at some indiscretion on the part of Mr. Smith, which had led that gentleman to mistake his right hand for his left. But the storm centre of the discussion had by this time deserted the dunes of Porth and the Green Round, and was occupied safely with odd obscenities in brick-sculpture and the new theatre at Stratford-on-Avon. Mr. Smith, it is true, was still interested in his own experience and went down to Wales in indignation only to return to Wimbledon in confusion. He had both seen and heard, and now all had vanished without a trace, as if it had been Aladdin's palace in the Eastern Tale. We do not know what he made of it; but it is probable that his state of mind was not very different from that of Dr. William Brown after the "sitting" with Rudi Schneider; though Mr. Smith would not be able to express himself with the clarity of the man of science.

But here, in the Green Round by the shore of Porth, was evidently the source of all the strange trouble that befell Hillyer. Again, we must take refuge in those *lacuna*, and profess our entire ignorance both of the nature and of the laws of the power that for a time at least had its centre in this place. We cannot pretend to determine, for instance, why one man was subject to the influence, while another was immune. Smith, on the face of it, was not a likely man to be affected. But it is quite possible that he had recovered from a bad attack of influenza a week or two before his visit; and his state of health may have laid him open to the attack of another enemy. The case of Hillyer is easier. He had been on the verge of a nervous breakdown in London immediately before his stay at Porth. No doubt he was benefited, as he says, by the sea air, the change of scene and the very different habit of life that he adopted for a time. Still, he was convalescent, not absolutely well. The walls of the fortress had been repaired and strengthened; but there seems reason to suppose that they were in no state to stand a siege. And, in fact, the enemy poured through the breech in a somewhat terrible manner. And in one respect at all events, Hillyer's affair stands alone, at least, that is my impression. There are, no doubt, many cases of a particular locality harbouring forces

unbenignant to man, and so constituting what is commonly called a "haunted" house, or a "haunted" wood; but at the moment I cannot recall any instance of these obscure and nameless energies following a man home, as it were, and harassing him at a distance from the place of their awful habitation. There is, for example, the book called *An Adventure*, the extraordinary story of what happened to Miss Ann Moberly and Miss Eleanor F. Jourdain at Versailles. For them, the clock was put back; time was no more. They were no longer in the twentieth century. They were rapt back into the eighteenth. They became witnesses of events that happened at Versailles, so far as time is concerned, on a particular day in the course of the French Revolution; and the trees, the lawns, the bridges were as they were in the Versailles of 1789. And such is the clear veracity of the record of these ladies' experiences, that I have never known any person who has read it be anything but perfectly convinced that every word is true. But let this be noted: once the ladies were without the walls of Versailles, the powers that were within ceased to operate or to manifest. Those that had seen the evidence of their presence, saw it no more when once the gates were passed. And, so far as I am informed, the like rule obtained in the following experience, which appeared in *Light* — issue of May 23rd, 1931 — which is quoted here, *in extenso,* by the kind permission of my friend, Mr. David Gow, Advisory Editor of *Light.* It is entitled "A Mountain Adventure". "J.C.P.", the author, is stated to be a woman in a responsible and dignified position. Her story, like the story of the ladies of Versailles, gives me the impression of absolute and scrupulous veracity.

"About the twentieth of July, 1929, while climbing the mountain, Nephin, in the weft of Ireland above Lough Conn, we had the following curious experience.

"The six, who climbed the mountain on one of the clearest of July days, consisted of three women and three men; one of the party — a girl — had an injured knee, and so did not go further than the place at which we stopped for lunch.

"The ascent was started about eleven o'clock. After climbing for an hour, through very heavy heather, we stopped beside a burn for lunch. After lunch we continued up the mountain, the girl with the injured knee going back to the cottage at which we had left the car, to wait for our return. We reached the top of the mountain about a quarter to three, and sat for a while looking at the surrounding country.

"We started down at about three, or a little after, in groups and singly, my husband by himself, F.H., James and myself together, and the other man quite a bit ahead of us. Suddenly F.H. turned away, and vanished over the shoulder of the mountain. Little was said, for she often took her own way down the various mountains we climbed during the summer. James and I continued our way for a while, then turned to each other and said: 'Something has happened to F.H.!' We felt so sure of this that we called to the other two

men, who returned. We agreed that they should go back to the mountain to where she was last seen, and search for her, while I should continue down and meet them at the cottage.

"Now this I did not know till afterwards, but F.H. does not know, cannot possibly imagine, what happened to her. She can only say that it was as though she had lapsed into complete unconsciousness, and all the while thought she was walking beside us. She was in reality walking straight away from us. She does not know what it was that 'took' her suddenly; she said it was as though there were *no Time* for a moment, and some strange force were pulling her away. Then she realised that we were not there, and heard the crying of voices. She went in the direction of the sound, thinking she would find someone; on crossing a ravine the voices were still audible, and she heard someone blowing a horn, but no one was in sight. Then she thought she saw a small person beyond and below her, possibly a child; she went down towards it, but on crossing another ravine, found no one, though the voices still continued. After this she realised she was lost, and headed for the white roadway below her, and walked about eight miles to a police-barracks, where we later found her.

"Now, when I left the men I went down the mountain. When I was half-way down I decided to look for F.H. on my lower level. I walked along, falling twice up to my waist into caves that were hidden beneath the heather. Presently I sat down and had no sooner done that than I heard crying behind me — a funny kind of crying, like a child that was lost — very distinctly. Looking around I saw, a long distance above me, someone I took to be James, waving. I waved back, got up, crossed a couple of hillocks, and looked for James again. No one was there. I sat down again, and was admiring the view when, directly behind me, someone laughed. Looking around I saw no one for a moment; then above me in almost the same place, I thought I saw James again.

"Getting up once more, I went straight up the mountain in his direction. In crossing a small burn I lost sight of him, and when I came out of the stream-bed I found no one. After this I went down the mountain to the cottage, expecting to find the girl with the injured knee there, but the cottage people told me she had not been there all the afternoon. Presently she came in, very angry, saying that early in the afternoon I had come down the mountain and waved to her, but had not waited for her to come up. (She had not gone up very far as she stumbled into a bog, and found the walking too hard.) Obviously I had not done any such thing.

"By 7.30 p in the men came back, exhausted, and without F.H. James had a curious story.. Twice he had seen, out of the tail of his eye, a club coming down on him. So strong had been the impression that he had jumped considerable distances down the mountain on each occasion. We were very worried by this time about F.H.'s disappearance. I asked the man of the

cottage what there was to fall into on the mountain.

"'Quarries?' I suggested.

"'Nothing,' he said.

"'Children on the mountain?' I asked.

"'No, they're in school,' he said.

"'What about the Little People?'

"He became very severe, and turned to go out, saying:

"'We do not talk about that.'

"We now took the car to search along the roads at the foot of the mountain, and so came upon F.H. at the police station."

Here again, the adventure ended at the foot of the mountain. The party were not pursued to their homes, as was Lawrence Hillyer. There are, indeed, likenesses between the two cases; notably, in the triviality of the annoyances inflicted. It is trivial and childish to make a woman lose her way on a mountain, to afflict a man with the sense that somebody is flinging clubs after him. It is trivial and childish to cause a man to be harried and seized by an angry and unreasoning officer and his stupid friends. It is even more trivial and childish to strew his track with broken chairs and shattered mirrors. But whatever this other side of things may be in itself, I have often noticed that its manifestations on this side are apt to be trifling and meaningless. The apparitions recorded by the Psychical Research Society are mostly insignificant, without purpose: a miller sees the ghost of a farmer, a mere casual acquaintance; and nothing happens. One of the most remarkable instances of the predictive faculty, combined with "clear sight" is contained in Mr. Theodore Besterman's book on Crystal gazing. A lady looking in the crystal at a house near Salisbury one morning saw Lady Barnby (wife of "For all the Saints" Barnby) washing her hands in a bedroom with an open door, in a Folkestone Hotel, about three and a half hours afterwards. This was verified in an extraordinary manner afterwards by Sir Joseph Barnby, who was present at the crystal gazing. I have no doubt that the story is veridical; but the prophetic gift has been employed on more tremendous issues.

But as to what is, or should be, the main question: what, who are the powers or forces that were manifested on Mount Nephin and in the Green Round? The Little People, the Fairies?

I believe there is no answer. We had better say, with the man of the cottage: "We do not talk about that."